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THE NEW REPUBLIC

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TRB®
FROM WASHINGTON

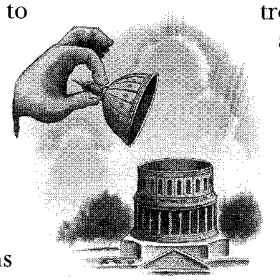
Choose or lose

The trouble with Washington—oh, all right, *a* trouble—is that there is so little correspondence between nice ideas and nice people. My North Carolina friends tell me that if you want an amiable fishing companion for a weekend, you could hardly do better than Jesse Helms. On the other hand, every so often a flint-eyed curmudgeon gets it right. Take Congressman Charles Taylor of North Carolina. In an article not long ago, *The Washington Post* portrayed Taylor, a Republican who grudgingly doles out federal appropriations for the District of Columbia, as a steel-sided, cold-hearted man whose "disdain" for the District is "palpable." As if that were not enough, among his steel-sided, cold-hearted, hard-nosed suggestions was one that the District should adopt educational vouchers, so that parents "can vote with their feet and escape this abysmal system." To that end, he mischievously tucked 2,000 "scholarships" into his appropriations bill, with the noisy support of the House Republican leadership and to the predictable and continuing outrage of the White House and the Democrats.

I've always found it a little odd that liberals hand the voucher idea to Republicans like Taylor and Newt Gingrich, rather than grabbing it for themselves. It is true that in many places vouchers are a solution in search of a problem: it's hard to get excited about improving rich suburban high schools that act as feeders for Ivy League colleges. However, for poor children, trapped in execrable schools, the case is moral rather than merely educational. These kids attend schools which cannot protect their physical safety, much less teach them. To require poor people to go to dangerous, dysfunctional schools that better-off people fled years ago, and that better-off people would never tolerate for their own children—all the while intoning pieties about "saving" public education—is worse than unsound public policy. It is repugnant public policy.

Moreover, the arguments against school choice are as intellectually flimsy as any set of arguments in public policy today. Will choice destroy the public school system? Competing with Toyota did not destroy GM, and it certainly did not do GM's customers any harm. Our higher education system is vouchered, inasmuch as you can take your federal loans and scholarships anywhere, and our public universities are none the worse for that. Interestingly, we have no gun-ridden, educationally dysfunctional state universities—not one. Imagine that.

Will choice leave the weakest students or the most ignorant parents isolated in rotten schools? The hostage-taking philosophy implicit in this argument—lock some in because others may not have the sense or ability to leave—is ethically peculiar, to say the least. But set that aside. If you believe that educational competition will make the system worse for those who cannot leave, then you should also believe that automotive competition has left millions of Americans stuck buying rattletrap Fords and Chevies that are worse than the 1978 models. Faced with the imminent flight of their customers, public schools will scream at first, and then flounder and then, as a last resort, begin to get their act together.



With choice, will taxpayers pour money into second-rate, fad-ridden, educationally dubious institutions? Will children end up in schools where history is bizarrely Afrocentric, math puts "reasoning" ahead of right answers, books are dumbed down, academics are downplayed, and standards are otherwise poor? What a shame if anything like that ever happened! It is hard to see how people will be made worse off by the chance to decide whether to keep what they have now or try something that they may like better. Some parents will pick bad schools, but surely that is better than letting bad schools pick parents.

"In the first independent evaluation of Cleveland's groundbreaking school voucher program," *The New York Times* reported recently, "a Harvard University study has found that the program was very popular with parents and raised the scores of those students tested at the end of the first year." Another study, reported in *The Public Interest*, finds that choice not only improves schools but strengthens parents' ties to them. In fact, if there is any objection that makes real sense, it comes not from the education establishment but from the libertarian right: when all students get government vouchers, all schools may gradually become government schools.

Maybe, but in the District of Columbia, now is not the time to worry about preserving the integrity of private education. We're talking about a public school system which, as the District's financial control board reported when taking over the schools late last year, loses 40 percent of its students between grades nine and graduation; whose superintendent's budget is four times the average of neighboring districts; whose board of education budget is larger than Chicago's, though Chicago has five times as many students; which spends much more per student than the national average, though it couldn't say how much because the system did not know how many students it had. What does all that money buy? According to the control board, the longer students stay in the D.C. schools, the "less likely they are to succeed educationally."

What baffles me most about vouchers is liberals' resistance to them, a fact which reflects more poorly on liberalism than any other fact I know. The case for school vouchers is the classic case of consumers against monopolies, the case that Ralph Nader and the Consumers Union taught us all in the 1970s. Vouchers are also a classic opportunity to equalize opportunity. Why should the poor be denied more control over their most important means of social advancement, when soccer moms and latte-drinkers take for granted that they can buy their way out of a school (or a school district) that abuses or annoys them?

No one, of course, expects the Democrats to reverse their position on school choice overnight. That is not how politics works. What is disturbing, though, is their adamant refusal even to entertain the idea. In a political movement or party, real corruption, as opposed to the pettifogging kind, comes when the leaders place the interests of politicians and public-service providers over the interests of their constituents, especially their poorest and weakest constituents. By embracing school choice—if not everywhere, then at least somewhere—liberals could at one stroke emancipate the District's schoolchildren while also emancipating liberalism from that basest sort of corruption. Now is a moment, one might add, when the Democratic Party could do with looking a little less corrupt.

JONATHAN RAUCH

JONATHAN RAUCH is author of *Demosclerosis: The Silent Killer of American Government* (Times Books).

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CORRESPONDENCE

Misled

To the editors:

I enjoyed Jeffrey Rosen's thought-provoking TRB ("Impeach Gore," October 6), in which he suggested that congressional Republicans try to impeach Vice President Gore for the very same fund-raising practices they have followed for years. I did not enjoy the misleading choice of headline, nor your decision to repeat this headline in a "tease" on the cover. This allowed Daniel Schorr, a formerly fine journalist who has evidently gotten lazy like the rest of his profession, to report, on September 23, on National Public Radio the "tease" for the article he evidently hadn't read, as a demand by TNR that the vice president be impeached.

JOHN M. GALLAGHER JR.
Media, Pennsylvania

To the editors:

In Jeffrey Rosen's TRB article, he claims that because "few facts are in dispute" regarding Gore's fund-raising activities the Congress should now be "courageous" and begin "debating whether or not to impeach Gore." Rosen then concludes that those debates would reveal that Gore was doing what congressmen routinely do "while sitting in the corridors of the Capitol."

By claiming there are "few facts in dispute," Rosen demonstrates that he is stuck in the administration's spin. Once a full investigation into Gore's fund-raising activities is completed, and assuming all relevant factual disputes can be resolved, the nation can then debate whether Gore merely strained the limits of the law to win reelection, or intentionally disregarded them. Either way, the bridge to the twenty-first century looks a bit more bumpy for the vice president than Mr. Rosen suggests.

ALAN J. JOAQUIN
Washington, D.C.

Grinding the ax

To the editors:

If I believed even half of the nonsense attributed to me by Alan Wolfe in his attack on my book *A Country of Strangers: Blacks and Whites in America* ("The Facts and the Feelings," September 29), I'd deserve contempt. But he fabricates and thereby continues TNR's record of mendacious reporting on race. He pretends to embrace "facts" and eschew "feelings," but he falsifies facts and lets his feelings run wild. He sneers brutally at young nonwhite women who hesitate to have children because of racism, and when I suggest that individuals could benefit from examining their prejudices, he likens me to "China's thought police." Please.

Few readers are likely to take such a diatribe seriously, but his misstatements need correcting. First, I am a journalist and do not aspire to be a sociologist. There is nothing wrong with my method of interviewing large numbers of ordinary folks about their racial experiences and attitudes and probing not only how they think but why. When I did that with Israeli Jews, Leon Wieseltier described me as "a man with the habit of truth" who "writes with great moral poise." When I do it with black Americans, however, Wieseltier's colleague fulminates.

Second, Wolfe holds me responsible for the untenable views of others. Here, as in my previous books, I listen to a wide variety of competing voices. I cannot agree with everyone I quote if I am to portray the textured, multilayered interactions between the races. Nor do I have Wolfe's compulsion to infantilize intelligent readers by hammering them with my personal opinions in every paragraph. Wolfe's ignorance of this fundamental of nonfiction writing leads him to monstrous assumptions. When I report on the nostalgia among some blacks for segregated schools in the South, he imagines that I agree that they were better, even when I explicitly call such views "sad and strange" and sketch a series of "searing moments" that describe the "scars of segregation." When I contrast a Nigerian professor's clear-eyed approach to teaching about Africa with a black poet's obvious romanticism, Wolfe imagines illogically that I prefer the poet. When I tell Roger Wilkins twice that I think he's wrong when he sees racism in Senator John Danforth's use of his first name alone, and then I go to the trouble of proving he's wrong and getting his reaction, Wolfe concludes that I wouldn't tell Wilkins he was wrong. Wolfe conveniently overlooks *my* conclusion: "Even a man with a good ear, with intuition finely honed, can be mistaken." Wilkins was hearing the echo of the timeworn practice, which he and others perceptively described, of whites diminishing blacks by using first names. It does happen. Why didn't Wolfe cite the doctor who was often called "Miss," the judge who was routinely called "John"? He can't stand to hear blacks tell their stories.

This points to Wolfe's third problem. He cannot get his mind around the ambiguity that pervades race relations. He wants to simplify, divorce prejudice

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from emotion, and locate the society precisely along a linear path between progress and deterioration. Life rarely runs in a straight line, however. My introduction is crammed with facts and figures that illustrate progress. But it's a book about attitudes, not living standards, so it describes back eddies and cross currents, some quantifiable, some not. Wolfe, the righteous opponent of school segregation, for example, doesn't mention the rising percentage of black children attending segregated schools. He thinks blacks I interviewed pathetic and resigned, when the book is peopled with those who have overcome discrimination without bitterness, and with whites who are working quietly for improvement, without guilt. He wants to dismiss whites' slights against the black manager of a bookstore because she shakes them off and goes on; he doesn't realize people can be hurt and resilient simultaneously.

Fourth, Wolfe gets my discussion of history completely wrong. Although I spend many pages puncturing some blacks' historical myths, he ludicrously implies that I sympathize with what I actually denounce as "synthetic history." Citing a student named Gholson who complains, as Soviet students did, of having to write lies on his exams, Wolfe adroitly fails to quote my next sentence: "When Gholson returned after forty-five minutes, however, and I asked him and other black students in the room for some examples of lies they had had to write on exams, they couldn't think of a single one." Their true grievances were silences, not lies, and into the vacuum of silence flow fabrications that fill some blacks' needs, destructively, in my view. If I explain, it doesn't mean I endorse. Wolfe also misrepresents the moving reunion of descendants of slaves and slaveowners at Somerset Place plantation. I do not believe that confronting history is always therapeutic. "Facing history can be liberating or imprisoning," I write. Somerset worked because both whites and blacks faced all of history realistically; the blacks did not blame contemporary whites for the sins of their forefathers. Wolfe also gets one historical fact wrong in accusing me of an error I did not commit: in dating the turbulence over busing as a means to integrate Boston's schools, he confuses the court case with the controversy that began many years earlier. Remember Operation Exodus and Louise Day Hicks in the mid-'60s?

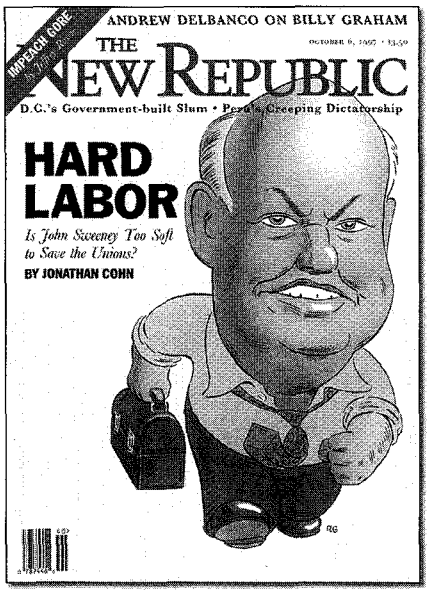
And so, Wolfe's inventions multiply. Nowhere do I endorse the offensive concept of "black exceptionalism." Nowhere do I write that blacks are "exceptional in their feelings." Those are his words, and it is he, not I, who introduces the pernicious notion of genetics, while slyly rejecting it. Many blacks and whites do see things differently—witness the question of O.J. Simpson's guilt or innocence—but it's a product of their life experience, not their genes.

Finally, no, I do not advocate "massive sensitivity training" for the country. That's laughable. The technique can be effective only with people who are not impervious to learning. It wouldn't work at TNR.

DAVID K. SHIPLER
Chevy Chase, Maryland

Alan Wolfe replies:

Since Leon Wieseltier praised Shipler's book on Arabs and Jews, he may well have assigned his new book to me assuming I would share his opinion of Shipler's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HARD LABOR
Is John Sweeney Too Soft to Save the Unions?
BY JONATHAN COHN

work. I did not. So much for the argument that TNR has a particular ax to grind on any subject—including race.

Don't hold me responsible for the untenable views of others, Shipler writes; my job is only to report. But Shipler constantly hammers away with his personal opinions throughout his book. Indeed he does so in the very first paragraph of his letter. Because I do not fall over in sympathy for the young nonwhite women who blame racism for their unwillingness to have children, my views reflect brutal sneering, while their views—and his—are presumed to reflect honest feelings. "He cannot stand to hear blacks tell their stories," Shipler writes of me. Actually, what I can't stand to hear is Shipler's didactic rendition of which stories are deemed authentic and which are not.

I also, it seems, cannot get my "mind around the ambiguity that pervades race relations." This charge may well be true. In my mind you either treat all people as deserving of respect or you do not—nothing ambiguous there. Others, including Shipler, disagree; they think that because of the "scars of segregation," whites have to extend sympathy to blacks in ways fundamentally different from what blacks ought to extend to whites. Such double standards are incompatible with honest dialogue.

Worse, Shipler's approach also leads to gross generalizations by race. I cite some of them in my review. Here is another: "Frequently, Jews want conversation while blacks want action." I find such statements patently offensive. The difference between Shipler and me is that when I hear people talk, it is the people who speak. When Shipler hears them talk, it is their group identity which speaks.

Yes, there has been progress in race relations, Shipler now writes. But, he wrote in his book, "there has not been a significant change in intimate, personal attitudes." Such a view—actually remarkably mistaken—gives license to Shipler to instruct those whites he repeatedly calls "conservative" in how to treat blacks. No thanks, Mr. Shipler. The races will find ways to get along—indeed they already are—the more they ignore well-meaning, but hopelessly patronizing, advice like yours.

Getting it wrong

To the editors:

Michael Brus's censure of Southwest in "Slumming It" (October 6) focuses narrowly on the physical environment and disregards the community spirit. He concludes that "there are no roots," in that quadrant of the capital. He is wrong.

When I moved to Washington, D.C., in 1977, I chose to live in Southwest because of its reasonably priced housing and proximity to the heart of the city. Gradually I learned that Southwest had more significant amenities, like civic efforts to maintain the common spaces and to reach across socio-economic barriers, and, more importantly, I was impressed by my neighbors and their willingness to help one another. Today, Southwest continues to flourish. Civic leaders have embarked on a plan to revive the economy, including the riverfront and the Waterside Mall.

Brus quotes a journalist complaining that when urban renewal experts demolished old Southwest, they concentrated on the deteriorating infrastructure and "couldn't see the social networks." Obviously, experts are still making that mistake.

PAULA HIRSCHOFF
Washington, D.C.

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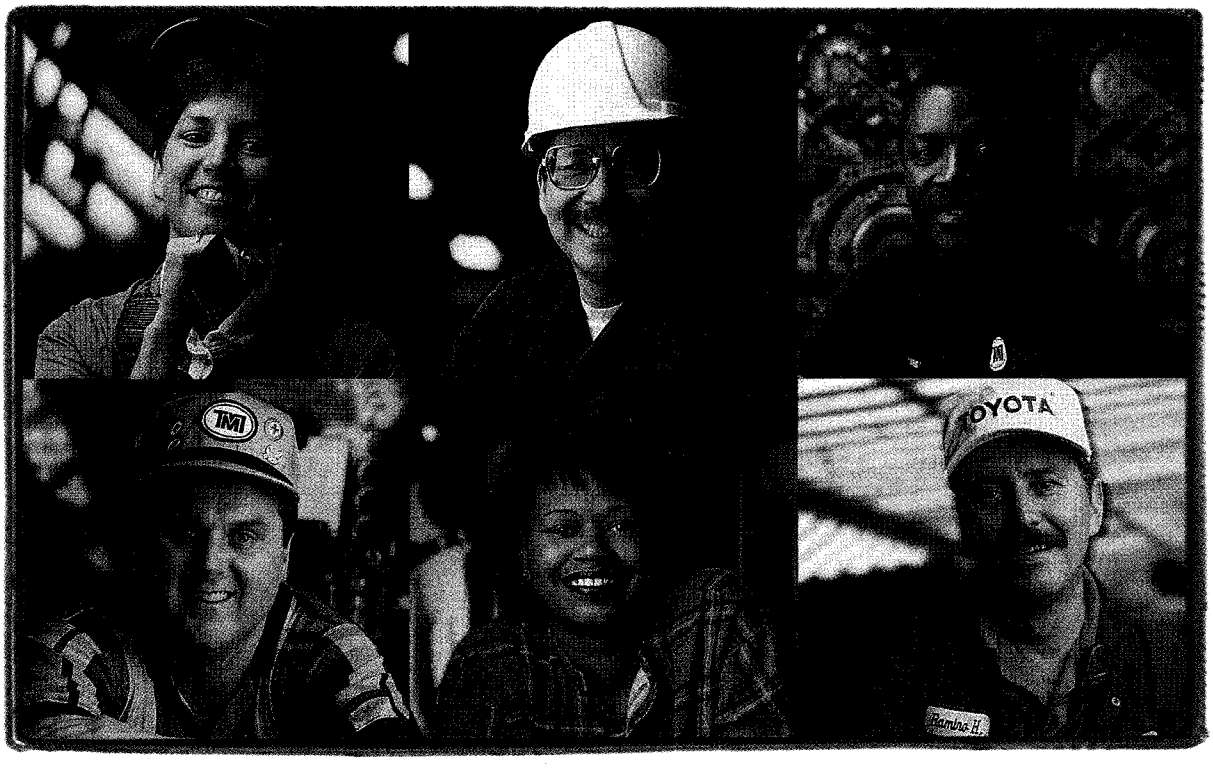

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

NOVEMBER 10, 1997

A NEW CHINA STRATEGY

As Bill Clinton and Al Gore prepare to roll out the red carpet for Chinese President Jiang Zemin, the Clinton administration knows, or claims to know, three big things about China. China must be paid attention to. China should not be an enemy. Many American interests are at stake in East Asia, no single one of which should define the entire Sino-American relationship.

These pearls of conventional wisdom, the precepts of what the administration likes to call "comprehensive engagement," did not come easy. During its first year, the administration, still influenced by candidate Clinton's tough rhetoric on Chinese human rights abuses, did not pay much attention to China. Then, after tending mostly to Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia, and Iraq, the Clinton foreign policy team awoke in the summer of 1994 to find itself embroiled in the issue of extending China's Most Favored Nation trading status. The administration swallowed hard, decided it had neither the backing nor the will to deny MFN on human rights grounds, and publicly ate its words.

"Comprehensive engagement" is the reaction to that initial humiliation. But does it really define a new approach, or does it merely codify lingering confusion? Deciding that America's China policy should not gyrate in response to disconnected flare-ups is not the same as deciding which issues you do care enough about to risk having a dispute. "Comprehensive engagement" fails to draw such distinctions, largely because it doesn't define what is most important: America's national interest.

This omission is strange, because America has a long-standing national interest in East Asia, one that remains as relevant today as it was fifty years ago. It is in the national interest of the United States to prevent any hostile power, or any potentially hostile power, from dominating the region. Today, China represents the most likely threat to that interest. The threat is, admittedly, embryonic. Imperial Japan was a technologically advanced military power bent on immediate, violent, territorial aggrandizement; the Soviet Union was an ideological competitor with global ambitions. Today's China, in contrast, is a rising economic power with political and territorial ambitions that it does not (yet) possess the military means to fulfill, and which are in any case focused mainly on its own neighborhood. But China is acquiring a military capability that could, in the not-too-distant future, lead to a bid for regional hegemony—and that prospect should be the focus of our policy.

U.S. policymaking still oscillates between competing concerns. The first is the tendency to see China exclusively through the prism of human rights, a tendency that Bill Clinton encouraged when he accused George Bush of coddling dictators "from Baghdad to Beijing." Iraq, or Nigeria, or Haiti, are relatively weak countries where the United States doesn't have many other interests. In such cases, international coalitions can be assembled, human rights pressure may have some impact, and that pressure does not entangle other objectives.

But while China's human rights abuses are enormous, so, alas, is its power to prevent outsiders from doing much about them. (Among other things, it has a veto on the United Nations Security Council.) The best approach in such a situation is for the U.S. government to keep faith with dissidents and encourage its citizens to subject China to multiple and creative forms of pressure and denunciation—by standing up for Disney's right to make a movie about China's suffocation of Tibet, for example—even if official foreign policy can do little to change China's internal behavior in the short term.

A less noble cause of distraction is the American tendency to think of the region as *territorius economicus*. Here too, Clinton administration rhetoric deserves some of the blame. The success of our policy toward China should not be measured in terms of how many jets Boeing has managed to peddle to the Chinese state airline—or, to pick an alarming current example, how many advanced nuclear reactors U.S. industry manages to sell.

In reality, traditional considerations of security and military power are *more* relevant in Asia than they are in Europe, both because the region boasts fewer liberal democracies, and because it has more outstanding border disputes, mostly involving China. In Europe, the United States has strong institutions, such as NATO, to maintain the balance of power and deny any one nation continental dominance. In Asia, however, the Clinton administration often subordinated the pursuit of security to the pursuit of trade, in the fashionable but mistaken belief that a good business climate will lead more or less automatically to a good security climate (and more democracy).

In short, some American power should be expended on the worthy but probably frustrating cause of human

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rights, or on the lucrative but strategically empty goal of greater commerce. But most American power should be husbanded for the long-term effort to constrain China's external behavior. The centerpiece of American policy in East Asia should be a regional security system whose goal would not be containment, in the aggressive, global, cold war sense, but rather a balance of power that would permanently dissuade China from making an aggressive bid for regional dominance.

Which brings us to the non-China element of our China policy. Building a balance of power will involve far greater attention to countries in Asia that traditionally have not been prominent in U.S. foreign policy thinking—India, a long-standing rival of China, comes to mind. The nine-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), for example, is far from a perfect instrument for balancing China's power. It includes nasty dictatorships (Burma), some governments with which America has a painful history (Vietnam), and some regimes that are hostile to American pressure for market liberalization (Malaysia). Its members have no interest in China's human rights record, and little interest in its protectionist trade practices. But they do worry that Beijing claims virtually the entire South China Sea for itself. When Vietnam recently complained about China's incursions into the Spratly Islands, ASEAN backed it up.

These countries don't want to spend the next century appeasing China. But they wonder whether the U.S. can be trusted to maintain its military presence in the Pacific over the long haul. The United States must show that commitment. The Philippines' territorial rows with Beijing have built support for renewed defense ties with the U.S., and the Clinton administration should pursue those, whether China objects or not. Indonesia wants allies against China, and recently signed a military pact with Australia. A security agreement with Indonesia, ASEAN's most powerful member, would do a great deal to deter China's southward push. Vietnam has taken a strong stand against Chinese expansionism, and, bizarre as it may sound, it may one day be a base for the American navy.

Japan is trying to forge greater links to ASEAN, and Tokyo is clearly essential to an American security system in East Asia. A successful effort by then-Assistant Secretary of Defense Joseph Nye to renew the U.S.-Japan military relationship was one of this administration's genuine foreign policy accomplishments. But if Japan is to lead its neighbors politically as well as economically, it must show greater contrition for the abuses it committed against China, Korea, and others in World War II. (In a real sense, NATO is today expanding into Eastern Europe because decades ago West German Chancellor Willy Brandt kneeled at the gate to the Warsaw Ghetto.)

No Clinton administration decision has done more to lay the foundations for an effective East Asian security system than its dispatch of aircraft carriers to the Taiwan Straits after Beijing fired missiles near Taiwan last year. The Clintonites should remember that as they respond to Chinese pressure on the island. The U.S. should certainly not encourage Taiwan's steps toward independence and international recognition, but Taiwan is not the backward autocracy it was decades ago. It is a democracy and a world trading power. If China remains a dictatorship, the U.S. may not be able to stop Taipei's drift toward independence—particularly as the island's native Formosan majority gains greater power. The United States must make its willingness to defend Taiwan against Chinese attack absolutely clear. Hesitation on that score would send a crippling signal throughout East Asia.

An effective U.S. policy toward China begins with a blunt look at what America can and cannot do. It cannot build a coalition to punish China for its human rights violations, and it cannot force Beijing to open its markets. But America does have natural allies against Chinese expansionism, and with skill and nerve it can lead them. When Jiang Zemin comes to Washington, Bill Clinton should tell him that China has the right to determine its own destiny, but that the United States is in East Asia to stay. And he should say it loud enough for the world to hear. •

NOTEBOOK

CAVEMAN: Congress' plan to overhaul the IRS—which President Clinton endorsed last week—may not be the end of the world. But the plan is the product of specious, poll-driven blather, and it would have been nice if he had expended just a little political capital trying to fight it. Consider its two main elements: presuming taxpayers to be innocent when audited, and making the agency report to an independent board composed mainly of private-sector representatives. The first is just silly. Taxpayers are presumed innocent already; that's why the overwhelming majority never get audited. Presuming innocence either means that tax cheats will get away with it more often—raising the burden on honest taxpayers—or it means nothing. The second idea is more dangerous. Government agencies, in order to maintain their independence, must be accountable only to elected officials. The CEO of General Electric shouldn't have any more say about whom the IRS investigates than the CEO of Microsoft should have about whom the Department of Justice prosecutes. The media, which credulously regurgitated whatever melodramatic grievances congressional Republicans fed them, was instrumental in propping up the plan. But it was the president who surrendered without a fight.

THUGS LIKE US: We already know that supporters of Teamsters President Ron Carey illegally funneled money from the union's general treasury into Carey's 1996 reelection campaign. Now it turns out they intimidated too. In congressional testimony last week, several Teamster organizers said they had been pressured to

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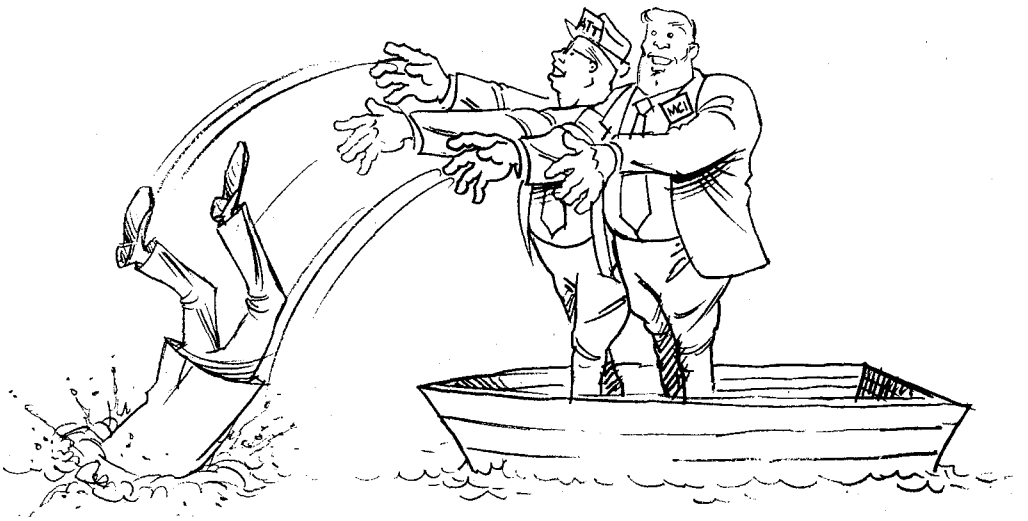
Long Distance phone companies reveal their true intentions for residential customers.

Throw 'em overboard.



"...(WorldCom) talked in detail about the benefits WorldCom and MCI would enjoy by getting out of residential long distance calling, which generally is a low profit business. 'Our religious focus is on the business customer,' (WorldCom) said. 'It is a jihad.'"

— *The Washington Post*, October 4, 1997

AT&T and MCI/WorldCom.

The big business, long distance phone companies are hanging up on residential customers.

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donate to Carey's campaign or lose their jobs. Even worse, Dane Passo, a Chicago truck driver who supported James P. Hoffa (Carey's opponent), testified that he was badly beaten by Gerald Zero, a prominent Carey ally who heads a large Chicago local. Zero, who was convicted on assault and battery charges stemming from the incident, remains in his post. Carey could technically remove Zero, but hasn't—and he spent this week denying, again, that his campaign put any undue pressure on Teamster members. We called on Carey to resign a few weeks ago ("Carey Out," October 13, 1997); now the case is even clearer. Carey's image has gone from goo-goo to goombah. How can he claim any credibility as a reformer?

POOPER SCOOPER: Ambrose Evans-Pritchard, the muckraking former Washington bureau chief for *The Daily Telegraph* of London, "is no conspiracy-theory lunatic." So writes columnist Robert Novak, who last week devoted his space to the Brit's new book—*The Secret Life of Bill Clinton: The Unreported Stories*—and lauded Evans-Pritchard for his "accuracy, industry, and courage." Novak was particularly impressed with the assertion that the Oklahoma City bombing was "a government sting operation that flew out of control," but then such revelations are nothing new for Evans-Pritchard. Who can forget his charges that Clinton, as governor of Arkansas, smuggled cocaine, had a nose "like a vacuum cleaner," and sanctioned "death squads"? Or his accusation that the autopsy on Vincent Foster failed to note "a crime scene photograph [that] shows a .22 caliber bullet wound in the neck of" Foster—a photo that no one can prove exists? Maybe the next time Novak thinks of lending credence to Evans-Pritchard by reprinting his "scoops," he should ask himself: Why are so many of Evans-Pritchard's stories, prior to his breaking them, unreported?

POLLUTED SPEECH: The Global Climate Information Project, an Orwellian Newspeak group funded by oil interests, is directing a $13 million ad campaign aimed at derailing the international treaty on global warming that is set to be finalized at the December Kyoto summit. The Project thinks the U.S. should refuse to participate at the summit because developing countries, which are granted exemptions by the proposed treaty, aren't doing enough to reduce their greenhouse gas pollution. Well, if these developing nations take the advice of Lee Raymond, who—as CEO of Exxon and chairman of the American Petroleum Institute—is one of the project's biggest backers, they never will. Speaking in Beijing at the World Petroleum Congress earlier this month, Raymond urged China and other developing nations to *increase* their use of fossil fuels. "The most pressing environmental problems of the developing nations are related to poverty, not global climate change," Raymond said. "Addressing these problems will require economic growth, and that will necessitate increasing, not curtailing, the use of fossil fuels." Talk about hot air. •

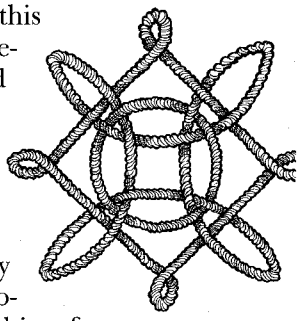
THE HARD QUESTIONS

TRUE CONFESSIONS

By Jean Bethke Elshtain

We are awash in confession. There is the proverbial low form on day-time talk shows, and the slightly higher form in bookstores. Rectitude, it seems, has given way to "contrition chic," a cheap way to get publicity, sympathy, and even absolution. This trend now extends to nations, where politicians ponder apologies on everything from slavery to genocide.

A healthy and dramatic counterpoint to this is the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Created by an act of the post-apartheid democratic parliament in 1995, the objectives of the commission are nothing less than to help secure a new political culture. The work of the commission is divided into three distinct but related parts: a full account of "gross" violations of human rights, consideration of amnesty appeals, and reparative measures. All of these activities take place in full view of the public.



During a trip to South Africa this past August, I met with the research office of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Cape Town. What I learned departs rather markedly from much of what is assumed about the TRC in the popular press. The TRC does not actually require that a perpetrator apologize, although many do—and this, of course, is a consideration for any amnesty request. Minimally what is demanded, however, is that full disclosure of politically motivated crimes be proffered. The emphasis is on the victims, not the victimizers, for the commissioners recognize just how important truth is to those who have suffered wrongs under cover of darkness or, perhaps even more horribly, in the full light of day under state sponsorship.

Writes Charles Villa-Vicencio, national director of research for the TRC: "It is important to insure that we all treat one another in the best possible manner so that even if we are not fully reconciled to another, we do not kill one another." And truth, he and others insist, is essential to this dynamic process. The fact that people were murdered, maimed, and brutalized for their political ties or their skin color must be acknowledged. Disclosure, Villa-Vicencio writes, is an essential "antidote to any attempt by apartheid revisionists to

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portray apartheid as no more than a desirable policy that went askew." The purpose of all of this is not, as some mistakenly suggest, to pat perpetrators on the head and send them on their way. Instead, the perpetrators are, through this process, stripped of being martyrs to the past; they must face a very new community, one that has full knowledge of what they did. "An authentic historical record of human rights abuse" is vital, notes Villa-Vicencio, because it serves "as a basis for assisting future generations to defend democracy and the rule of law in the face of any future attempt at authoritarian rule."

The steps in this process are as clear cut as they are strenuous. There are four: first, the acknowledgement of deeds and a confession of the truth; then contrition, defined as a willingness to live a different kind of life; next the restitution of past wrongs; and finally the extending and receiving of forgiveness. For the South Africans with whom I spoke, the steps that follow truth-telling are constitutive of building a genuine democracy—based on legal institutions—that will last for years, even generations, to come. Restorative justice, as they call it in South Africa, means neither cheap forgiveness nor "the dominant western mode or retributive or punitive justice." The question, on which the South Africans have staked their future, is whether an alternative type of justice—political restorative justice which addresses the legitimate concerns of victims and survivors while seeking to reintegrate perpetrators into the community—provides a viable alternative to contrition chic, and to the horror of wrongs suffered and vengeance sought, generation after generation.

Full reparation and compensation is never possible. But a political form of forgiveness as an alternative form of justice has implications that go well beyond the TRC and present-day South Africa. The TRC commissioners hope to bestow on future generations, in their own society and beyond, a vision of justice that challenges many of the models of justice with which we have long been familiar. Reconstruction and restoration, they insist, "is an inherent but often neglected part of judicial theory." As Bishop Desmond Tutu told *Commonweal*: "It is not the case that the perpetrators get off scot free. They have to stand in the full glare of their city and say I did this and this and this.... Having to come clean in public has a very heavy cost. Many have found that their marriages, if not broken, have fallen into serious difficulties because often their wives and children didn't know that that was what daddy was doing. While reparation is not compensation, one of the things that has happened is that these people who were treated like rubbish now have a story that the country acknowledges. Victims have been given an official forum where they have told their story.... That is something whose value we can never compute."

The most difficult task of all, the TRC tells us, is to remember and to forget. Not forget in the sense of collective amnesia but in an altogether different way—as a release from the full weight and burden of the past. •

Give to UNICEF? No thanks.

TRICK AND MISTREAT

By Nicholas Eberstadt

On my block, I'm the guy who won't drop any money into the little orange box when the local kids cry out, "Trick or treat for UNICEF!" "What's the matter?" my neighbor's 6-year-old daughter demanded when I turned her down last year. "Don't you want to help the poor?" "I do want to help the poor," I muttered, "but that's not the way to do it." "But it's for poor children!" she frowned. She looked at her father, then at me, and then a terrible glare of recognition came into her 6-year-old eyes. She lives down the street from a man who hates poor children—the Grinch Who Stole Halloween.

What I could not explain to her—but can explain to you as Halloween rolls around again—is that there are good reasons not to drop your change into the UNICEF box. Once justly renowned as a savior of hungry and sick kids, the organization has—like so much of the United Nations apparatus—degenerated into a corrupt, self-perpetuating bureaucracy. Worse, lately it may even be harming at least some of its intended beneficiaries.

After World War II, a newly established UNICEF helped to forestall famine in a desperate post-war Western Europe, and greatly reduced the threat of starvation in some parts of Asia. In the 1950s and early 1960s, UNICEF began concentrating on lowering infant mortality in the world's most distressed regions. Thirty years ago, as the British medical authority Dr. James Le Fanu has written, the organization's time and resources were "directed towards promoting sanitation, the control of specific diseases such as malaria, yaws, tuberculosis, and trachoma, and improved child nutrition." Thanks in part to the efforts of UNICEF, for example, the perennial scourge of smallpox has been eradicated from the modern world.

By the 1990s, however, the organization's focus had changed dramatically. "The practical activities of UNICEF on which its reputation rests," Le Fanu argued in an essay titled "How UNICEF Fails the World's Poorest Children," had come to be "replaced by activities for which all U.N. agencies are notorious: International Declarations emerging from world conferences of experts." UNICEF's 1992 annual report, for example, barely even mentions its efforts against the famine in Somalia. Its pages overflow with empty news of declarations, summits, symposia, and policy statements—such as the "54 Articles of the Convention of the Rights of the Child."

As UNICEF's own understanding of its mission has changed, so too has the direction of its cash flow.

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Today, the combined administrative budget for "regional offices" and headquarters is $346 million—more than a third of the approximately $1 billion budget. And this number does not include spending on UNICEF's 210 field offices around the world (including Florence, Italy). Nor does it take into account the organization's "national committees" which raise 35 percent of UNICEF's budget, and are allowed to keep 25 to 40 percent of the money to cover their own administrative expenses. That's right: somewhere between a quarter and two-fifths of the money raised abroad in UNICEF's name can go straight to the fundraisers themselves.

Paybacks and overhead aren't the only problems. A 1994 Booz, Allen, & Hamilton report—the most serious independent audit of UNICEF so far—identified a number of failings including disguising bloated overhead costs, lack of financial control, a proclivity for luxury accommodations during travel, overstaffing, and a 25-million-dollar-a-year internal public relations machine. It also observed that the fastest growing parts of UNICEF's budget are not, say, medical or food aid to poor children, but rather research, studies, publications, travel, and consultants.

There has been waste of another sort, too. As *The Los Angeles Times* reported in 1995—and as the organization ultimately conceded—UNICEF's staff in Nairobi "stole $1 million in relief funds for suffering Africans and wasted $8 million to $9 million more." A subsequent internal investigation blamed not only Nairobi's particular "UNICEF representative and key staff members," but also "the overall oversight role by UNICEF headquarters."

Even traditional well-wishers are warning UNICEF to shape up: the governments of Australia, Canada, Denmark, and Switzerland recently called for "a clear definition of administrative and program support costs and more effective accounting." Last year the State Department, ordinarily a reflexive UNICEF booster, issued a report urging that UNICEF cut back on overhead and meetings. But are UNICEF officials listening? If so, it isn't obvious. The Booz Allen report, Executive Director Carol Bellamy announced immediately, "doesn't tell me how to run everything, and it's not a Bible." In her 1996-97 integrated budget, Bellamy advocated expanding UNICEF's Brussels office and called for the creation of a new office to serve Central and Eastern Europe, plus the countries of the former Soviet Union. The proposed location: Geneva (as in Switzerland).

But the real scandal at UNICEF these days is that the organization has begun issuing medically unsound advice to the very people it is supposed to serve. At issue is breast-feeding and HIV, a matter of potentially huge concern in Africa, where rates of HIV infection among women are high and breast-feeding of newborns is common practice. Since 1985, scientists have known the virus can be transmitted through breast milk. Some studies suggest that around 14 percent of uninfected babies could acquire the virus if they were breast-fed by their HIV-positive mothers. One South African study, reported in *The New York Times*, put the risk at 28 percent.

Unfortunately, UNICEF's ideology leaves it particularly ill-equipped to deal with this new public health threat. Almost two decades ago, UNICEF helped lead a successful campaign aimed at stigmatizing infant formula in the Third World, and the organization remains dedicated to promoting breast-feeding as the best possible infant regimen. (Remember the Nestlé boycott?) In the face of criticism from health professionals, the organization did eventually release (though not until 1996) an "interim statement" allowing doctors to explain the risk of breast-feeding to HIV-positive mothers. But "item one" of the statement contained a caveat: "As a general principle, in all populations, *irrespective of HIV infection rates*, breast-feeding should continue to be protected, promoted and supported." (The italics are mine.)

The conundrum for UNICEF, of course, is that infants must be nourished by something; and to shy away from breast milk in cases of maternal HIV infection is necessarily to support the use of formula. As a South African doctor told *The New York Times* in June, UNICEF's posture "is like telling someone you are positive and you can transmit the virus through unsafe sex and then not providing condoms." You can think of UNICEF's medical obtuseness as a cruel manifestation of bureaucratic inefficiency, a product of blinding ideology, a simple human tragedy, or some combination of the three. But think of it on Halloween when *your* neighbor's well-meaning kid shows up at the door, box in hand, asking you to subsidize it.

NICHOLAS EBERSTADT is a researcher with the American Enterprise Institute and the Harvard Center for Population and Development Studies.

COLOMBIA DISPATCH

RUNNING SCARED

By Joshua Hammer

Diego Turbay doesn't go anywhere without his twelve-man security detail these days. Not since the one-page typed letter arrived on his doorstep in mid-September, bearing greetings—and a warning—from the 15th Front of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC, the Western Hemisphere's oldest Marxist-Leninist guerrilla army. "If you haven't resigned your candidacy by September 20th, we won't answer for what can happen to you," the message read. "You will be declared a military target."

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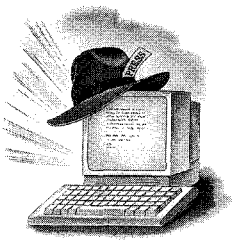
Turbay, 30, is running for mayor of Florencia, a steamy Amazon town of 75,000 people that lies in the heart of Colombia's Caquetá state, a coca-producing guerrilla stronghold. The area provides an apt vantage point from which to view the unraveling of Colombia. During the past three months, two guerrilla forces, the FARC and the Popular Liberation Army (EPL), have launched a campaign of murder and intimidation. Aimed at disrupting local elections on October 26 and destabilizing President Ernesto Samper's scandal-ridden government, the offensive has been brutally effective, even by Colombian standards. Dozens of mayors have been kidnapped; at least eleven have been assassinated. Hundreds of candidates for both mayor and city council have stepped down under the threat of death. The elections increasingly resemble a strange exercise in ghost politics, with empty tickets and abandoned ballots. Political analysts now say the guerrillas will force the cancellation of voting in 10 percent of the country's municipalities, and place their own representatives in positions of power in another 15 to 20 percent.

A tainted election may mean the end of Colombia's tainted president. In 1995, Samper's campaign treasurer, Santiago Medina, went public with charges that the president had knowingly accepted $6.2 million in campaign funds from the Cali drug cartel. Samper denied the allegations and managed to stave off impeachment by Congress. But the drip of evidence seeming to show his long-standing ties to *narcotraficantes* has undermined his moral and political authority. Recent polls in Colombia place his popularity at less than 20 percent; the United States denied him the right to enter the U.S. a year ago because of his alleged ties to drug traffickers. Last week, in a controversial visit, U.S. drug czar Barry McCaffrey reportedly warned Samper that Colombia was descending into a permanent state of anarchy.



Indeed, unable to persuade the rebels to talk peace or guide his poorly equipped armed forces, Samper has presided over the steady worsening of Colombia's civil war. In 1985, the guerrillas numbered 10,000 men and carried out attacks in 177 counties; in 1996, they had grown to 17,000 soldiers and expanded their reach to 622 counties, or more than half the country. With several hundred million per year flowing into their coffers through taxes on coca growers and ransoms on kidnappings, they have been able to survive at a time when Marxist-Leninist insurgencies are in retreat.

The guerrillas are strongest in Caquetá—a sparsely populated expanse of cattle ranches, coca farms, and dense jungles about 350 miles south of Bogota. The ill-trained army recruits seldom leave their fortified bases. Virtually every candidate for mayor and municipal council has ended his campaign under the threat of death. Except, that is, Diego Turbay. I flew to Florencia from Bogota in late September as the guest of the Turbay family, Caquetá's most powerful political clan. Diego Turbay met me at Florencia's small airport, surrounded by a squad of bodyguards waving sawed-off shotguns and Uzis. A jovial man with wire rim glasses and a big, round paunch, Turbay said there was no alternative but to "choose democracy."

Democracy, of course, is a loosely defined term in Colombia, and the Turbays have been widely criticized by the press and politicians as among the worst of the country's corrupt oligarchs. In many ways their family history tracks the tragic history of Columbia. After emigrating from Beirut in the 1930s, the clan prospered as bankers and ranchers in the Magdalena Valley, near the city of Medellín. Julio Cesar Turbay, Diego's great uncle, was the country's president from 1978 to 1982. Considered the most repressive of Colombia's recent presidents, he maintained close ties to the country's marijuana cartels—until a "60 Minutes" exposé. His daughter Diana, an investigative journalist, was kidnapped by Pablo Escobar's Medellín cartel in 1991 and later died during a rescue attempt. Hernando, Diego's father, served for two decades in Colombia's House and Senate—according to locals buying votes and dispensing jobs to cronies—before passing the torch to his son Rodrigo. On June 16, 1995, the 35-year-old Rodrigo was seized by fifteen FARC guerrillas while driving back to Florencia after inaugurating an electrical plant in a nearby village. In a communiqué, the FARC accused Rodrigo of accepting millions of dollars in kickbacks on a highway construction project and demanded a $30 million ransom, too steep a price even for the wealthy Turbays. In May 1997, after Turbay had spent twenty-two months and twenty-two days in captivity, the FARC announced that he had drowned with four guerrillas when their canoe capsized in the Rio Caguán. His emaciated body was found floating in the muddy river the next morning, his face chewed off by piranhas. Diego accused the FARC of murdering his brother, and immediately announced his candidacy for mayor of Florencia.

Today, Turbay—a political novice with reputedly clean hands—runs his campaign out of the family's crumbling, heavily guarded villa on the outskirts of Florencia. "You can have all the armed men in the world, and you are never well protected," he told me over a six-course Sunday breakfast with his mother—a former congresswoman—and a dozen aides. But because of his willingness to run, partly out of a desire to get even with the guerrillas, partly out of idealism, he has brought new life to a once-moribund campaign. Four candidates have reentered the mayoral race to challenge him. "Look, I stopped a process here," he told me. "I said, 'No, I won't resign.' So many more politicians here said, 'Okay, we'll stay in the race.' " Turbay is already talking about fighting corruption if he becomes mayor—and if, of course, he's still alive after election day.

JOSHUA HAMMER is *Newsweek*'s South America correspondent.

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A new prescription for medical research.

CURE ALL

By Richard Wurtman

Progress in treating AIDS has been remarkable—so remarkable, in fact, that it's easy to overlook how little progress we've made in treating other deadly diseases. In 1996, the HIV-related death rate dropped for the first time; among patients receiving treatment in one Canadian study, mortality fell by more than 60 percent. Yet lupus, emphysema, drug abuse, and most cancers kill at nearly the same rate they did fifteen years ago, when AIDS first appeared. The period between 1930 and 1965 was a golden age of treatment discovery: every year it seemed like we conquered another deadly sickness. But since then, despite fourfold increases in research expenditures by government and industry, about the only common diseases besides AIDS that have become treatable are herpes simplex infections (like cold sores) and a few of the less-common cancers.

AIDS researchers, of course, had one thing going for them. Like no killer since polio, the disease captured national attention, and promoted national anxiety. Once that happened, the usual process for discovering and certifying new treatments changed radically. Scientists focused single-mindedly on finding effective drugs; the Food and Drug Administration abandoned its posture of focusing more on a new drug's side effects than on the suffering it was designed to treat. This, in turn, made the prospect of developing AIDS drugs more profitable for pharmaceutical companies, which already possessed the knowledge they needed to develop the protease inhibitors that now seem to be saving lives.

These developments are welcome, but they also raise an obvious question: Why can't we do the same for other deadly diseases? Reforms by the FDA now moving through Congress are a step in the right direction. But we need a wholesale rethinking of how we harness the practical applications of basic medical research—something far more sweeping than anything now being contemplated on Capitol Hill or in the academy. And to make that possible politically, we will need a few more national crusades—akin to the one that developed in response to AIDS.

Prior to the 1940s, scientists generally approached disease in the most straightforward way possible: they looked explicitly for a cure. But that began to change in 1945, when Vannevar Bush, then science adviser to President Truman, issued a report called *Science: The Endless Frontier*. Bush urged scientists to work independently, to follow their own curiosity in choosing what to study, and to strive only for peer approval in setting research objectives. For medical researchers, that meant *not* committing themselves to finding first-ever treatments for untreatable diseases, but focusing instead on basic knowledge about how diseases and the body work. Expanding the medical knowledge in this nondirected way, Bush wrote, would ultimately lead to better treatments.

In fact, Bush got it backwards. Only rarely has the discovery of a new type of drug been based on such understanding; usually the discovery of the drug triggers research into the biological systems that underlie its actions. Scientists discovered the first antidepressant drug, iproniazid, because a related compound used to treat tuberculosis made depressed TB patients so euphoric that they stopped taking it. Subsequent research on iproniazid led to the chemical theories of depression that have generated all subsequent antidepressant agents. We've been able to treat such diseases as Parkinson's and Hodgkin's for at least a generation, even though we don't understand them. It was only a decade or two ago that scientists began to understand why aspirin works.

As a result, once Bush's argument became dogma, research targeted at finding treatments began to dwindle. During the last few decades, fewer and fewer scientists have received the kind of training in clinical research, involving live human subjects, that treatment discovery invariably requires. In particular, many young clinicians have decided to forego studies involving human subjects in favor of much safer ones in basic-science laboratories. A 1994 review by the National Institutes of Health found that just 10 percent of all the graduates of M.D./Ph.D. programs funded by that institution went on to carry out *any* studies on live human subjects. During the golden age, few M.D.'s even bothered with Ph.D.'s in the first place, and the great majority did most of their research on real patients.

Another obstacle in the treatment research process was the FDA, whose obsessively cautious approach to reviewing new drugs had an equally chilling effect on private sector innovation. With the FDA reflexively skeptical of any new drug, lest it turn into another thalidomide, pharmaceutical companies became more skittish about new ventures. (I should disclose my own bias here, which is also a source of my knowledge. In addition to teaching at MIT, I am a director of a company called Interneuron Pharmaceuticals, Inc., which develops drugs to treat brain disorders.)

At first, finding a treatment for AIDS ran up against these roadblocks, too. Researchers concentrated on understanding as much as possible about how the virus works. Some even suggested that once we fully understood the virus's genes, no studies on humans would be necessary. The FDA, meanwhile, was predictably skeptical when it came to possible treatments, and concentrated on prophylactic measures such as improving the blood supply's safety and making sure condoms were impermeable.

But that's when public pressure began to mount. In

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The Lynching Of Leo Frank

ATLANTA HISTORY CENTER

Crowds gathered outside the sweltering courtroom in Atlanta, Georgia, where Leo Frank was on trial for murder in the summer of 1913. It had been a brutal killing. Mary Phagan, a young girl who worked for pennies a day in a pencil factory, was found in a basement coal bin, her body mutilated.

There were two suspects: a Black custodian and Frank — a New Yorker, a Jew and the factory boss. Despite clear evidence pointing to the custodian, Frank was indicted.

Resentments against Northerners and Jews ran high in the South. Mary Phagan's minister said, "One old Negro would be poor atonement for the life of this innocent girl." A local journalist wrote: "If a black man raped a white girl, we'd know what to do with him. Why should a Jew get any different treatment?" As the jury walked to the courthouse, the crowd yelled: "Hang the Jew, or we'll hang you!"

The jury took only four hours to convict Leo Frank. Crowds cheered when the judge sentenced Frank to death. Across the South, for many years afterward, little girls skipped rope to a new rhyme: "Little Mary Phagan went to work one day. Little did she know the Jew would take her life away."

More than a year after Frank's conviction, the custodian's lawyer announced that his client, who had been convicted as an accessory to murder, was in fact Mary Phagan's sole killer. A hundred thousand letters were sent to the governor, demanding a pardon for Frank.

In June 1915, Georgia Gov. John Stanton commuted Frank's death sentence and transferred him to a state prison. People across Georgia burned effigies of the governor.

A month later, 25 prominent citizens of Marietta forced their way into the prison at night. Without firing a shot, they bundled Leo Frank into a car and drove him through the dark countryside.

Beneath a large oak, the leader of the mob said, "Mr. Frank, we are now going to do what the law said to do — hang you by the neck until you are dead."

Toward morning, a crowd of Marietta residents gathered to celebrate around the tree. Some cut snippets of the rope with their pocket knives or tore shreds from Leo Frank's nightshirt as souvenirs.

(Leo Frank's story is told in The Shadow of Hate: A History of Intolerance in America, *a curriculum kit produced by Teaching Tolerance.)*

TEACHING TOLERANCE

MORRIS DEES, *Executive Chair*
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March 1987, activist Larry Kramer called for an "all-out federal war to find a cure for this plague"; with the help of sympathetic celebrity spokespersons, aggressive public outreach, and, above all, a mobilized gay political community—that's exactly what was happening. In 1986, the Burroughs-Wellcome Company submitted for approval AZT, the first drug designed to thwart retroviruses like the Human Immunodeficiency Virus. Even though AZT lacked the supporting data usually required from a large-scale clinical "Phase III" study, the FDA examiner, Ellen Cooper, approved its use in a then-astonishing 107 days. The year before, prior to AZT's approval, the FDA had also authorized a record 4,800 patients to take that drug on a "compassionate use" basis, and, in 1987, it established an accelerated review process for all new AIDS drugs. (In the early stages of the epidemic, the FDA also offered companies that would produce such drugs additional financial incentives as well as exclusive marketing arrangements.)

Even leading health officials came to realize that the old way of certifying drugs was obsolete. One pivotal episode came in April 1988, when Democrat Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi from California asked Anthony Fauci, probably the senior NIH scientist and administrator researching AIDS, whether—if he were a patient suffering from an AIDS-related infection—he would try to obtain a nonapproved drug for treatment. He acknowledged he would. Sentiments like these were behind the FDA's decision that year to implement its "Subpart E" regulations, which provided for close and continuous consultation with the companies testing potential AIDS treatments, thus decreasing the likelihood that the companies would be sandbagged when they filed for drug approval. The FDA employed new, less restrictive mechanisms for importing unapproved drugs, and put into operation the "Parallel Track" policy, which provided test drugs to patients who, for medical or geographic reasons, couldn't qualify as regular participants in a Phase III study.

More reforms came in 1992, when Congress passed the User Fee Act, providing the FDA with much-needed additional funding to hire examiners for certifying drugs. A year later, the FDA started allowing companies to market AIDS drugs based on evidence that the drugs merely decreased viral load, regardless of whether hard data existed that the drugs increased lifespan.

This streamlining drastically altered incentives for the private sector. For a typical company, developing an AIDS drug might suddenly mean just four years of research—and outlays of about $80 million ($20 million per year for preclinical studies for two years, another $40 million for one year of clinical studies, plus a year for statistical analysis and FDA evaluation). Developing a new Prozac clone, on the other hand, might require seven years or longer, including three years for clinical studies, for a total of $160 million. Companies began to use the knowledge they'd long since accumulated to make a new family of anti-HIV drugs, the protease inhibitors. Once companies decided to develop anti-HIV protease inhibitors, they succeeded in record time.

At the same time, the culture of AIDS research was transforming. Once individual scientists could disregard the peer consensus against applied research, it wasn't long before they realized that the best way to use the new drugs involved an old strategy. Scientists have known for forty years that combinations of drugs are necessary to defeat invader cells that mutate rapidly, as HIV does. Sure enough, it was a combination of three drugs that eventually worked against HIV.

Could we apply a similar approach to other diseases? Congress apparently believes that we could, and has already taken the first steps toward applying these lessons. The House and Senate have passed bills that would allow the FDA to approve a drug based on one well-controlled Phase III Study (not two, as is now the case); to provide fast-track designation, as it has done for AIDS drugs, to a candidate drug for *any* serious or life-threatening condition; to approve such drugs based on data that shows a drug somehow fights a malady, even if there's not yet evidence about whether it increases lifespan; and to give patients, through their doctors, expanded access to not-yet-approved test drugs. The new law would also allow companies to disseminate peer-reviewed scientific articles describing "off-label" uses for drugs initially marketed for another purpose (for example, the use of the anti-cancer drug taxol to treat uncommon cancers in addition to the one for which it has been approved).

This should spark more risk-taking by drug companies in choosing among diseases to treat—and it should do so without increasing the likelihood that patients will suffer because of unexpected side effects. There is, after all, no reason that increasing the efficiency of the drug review process need decrease its thoroughness. The tests that the FDA rightly requires for identifying possible side effects are thoroughly accepted, and no one is suggesting that those procedures be changed.

Of course, none of these new laws will matter if the FDA chooses not to apply them—or if policymakers and the scientific community remain wedded to their post-1950s research sensibility. That's why political pressure—more wars on disease—is so important. Critics frequently cite the "War on Cancer," launched in 1971, as evidence that such campaigns are futile. But that war was abandoned too soon and involved too few of the institutions that ought to have participated, such as the FDA and the drug industry. And keep in mind that the War on Cancer in fact gave us taxol and other anticancer drugs, as well as AZT, and it underwrote the training of many researchers who would later do important work on AIDS.

AIDS may have been unique in its ability to mobilize public opinion. On the other hand, constituencies also exist for breast cancer and other diseases, and these groups would do well to heed the lessons from AIDS—and demand not simply more research, but the right kind.

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Christie Whitman's last stand?

SWAMPED IN JERSEY

By Matthew Cooper

This isn't a Jersey joke. Route 206, which unwinds along the gentle hills of this state, isn't the traffic-thick turnpike. There's no Vince Lombardi rest stop here, no sulfur fumes wafting on the air. The foliage is positively Vermont, save for the landscape dotted with the corporate campuses of big pharmaceutical makers like Bristol-Myers Squibb, the company Governor Christie Whitman has come to visit this October morning. This is the equestrian's kind of place: rich and Republican. Her father, who ran Pontrefract, a 200-plus acre estate in western Jersey, was an Eisenhower intimate; her childhood pals included a fellow named Steve Forbes. The first-term governor may work the Portuguese in Newark's Ironbound ward or the synagogues of Livingston, or go "down the shore" and eat "tomato pie" with the Italians in Belmar. But terra firma is leafy, affluent Jersey. The Garden State.

And the 433-acre research center which Bristol-Meyers Squibb is opening here is manna for a politician: not just scads of new jobs, but high-paying, non-polluting jobs. Whitman works it, telling the friendly, assembled crowd "this underscores everything we are doing." She even has facts, if she needs, to back up her rhetoric. New Jersey's economy is growing. Crime is at a twenty-three-year low. With an educated workforce, the state seems poised, as Bill Clinton might blather, to compete in the twenty-first century. All of this should propel her into incumbent nirvana, alongside Clifford Case, Millicent Fenwick, and Tom Kean, Jersey's other legendary patrician politicians. No wonder the Squibb folks are cheering.

But is there enough Whitman country for Whitman to win? Across the state, the applause for Whitman is dying down. Despite all that seems right with Jersey, Whitman is in a ferociously competitive race. The little-known mayor of Woodbridge, Jim McGreevey, has shot within four points of Whitman, according to several public and internal campaign polls. More importantly, Whitman is having a hard time goosing her approval rating over 50 percent; the percentage an incumbent gets for her job performance this close to an election usually indicates what she'll come away with after the polls close.

Hovering around 42 percent, Whitman is dangerously close to getting thrown out. The national media, which cottoned to her combination of fiscal tough talk and social tolerance on gays and abortion, seems taken aback that there's actually an election going on in Jersey, let alone a close one. Whitman believes the tight contest is a surprise only to outsiders who don't understand the state. "They should expect that New Jersey voters are going to be tough," she told me in October. "It's been this way. They're ticket splitters. They're highly educated. And they want to know, 'What have you done for me lately?'... It's tough and I respect them for that." Whitman insists that she was never going to win big like Kean did in 1985 when he was reelected governor with an incredible 70 percent of the vote. "The '90s were not the '80s. We haven't had the money and largesse to spread around and fund every program probably more than they needed to be funded."

In the final days of the campaign, Whitman has fallen back on her innate likability. She's airing a gauzy spot, "Cool Mom," by vaunted GOP consultant Mike Murphy in which the endorsements come from her own clean-scrubbed kids. There are focus-group tested phrases like "she always taught us to take responsibility." But likability doesn't win elections. Ask Rudy Giuliani, who seems poised for victory despite being less than lovable. Or, conversely, Ann Richards, the beloved Texas governor whom voters evicted in 1994. Whitman may be heading for the same unexpected tumble. The reason is partly Whitman's defensive campaign. But basically, she's falling victim to an old problem in American politics: the difference between the way one is perceived nationally and the way one is perceived at home. And she bares the burden of the moderate Republican, vulnerable from the left and the right. Indeed, Case was defeated by a supply-sider in 1978; Fenwick by Democrat Frank Lautenberg in 1982. Whitman is getting similarly squeezed.

It's hard to remember now just how stunning Whitman's national debut was in 1990. The country was in a slump, but Jersey was reeling. Real estate prices collapsed; the state lost nearly 200,000 jobs between 1989 and 1993. And the governor, Jim Florio, had infuriated voters with a $2.8 billion tax hike designed to placate the state supreme court, which had demanded that the state's poorer school districts get more of the funds dispensed to suburbs. Running for the Senate that year, Whitman was the Republican palooka who was supposed to get boxed by the seemingly invincible Bill Bradley. But she leveraged the state's anger against the aloof senator, and came within a point of beating him. Three years later, she took on Florio and won.

A GOP star was born. Her angular, slightly pallid face was ubiquitous—patrician, likable, and, unlike Gingrich and company, definitely not scary. (Al Franken, the comedian, once said that, with her blonde mane and prominent features, she looked like the perfect fusion of Charles and Diana.) Republican pols around the country wanted to be photographed by her side; Gingrich asked her to deliver the Republicans' response to Clinton's State of the Union in 1995.

It didn't matter, of course, that Whitman was woefully out of touch with the national GOP. She was not only an unreconstructed Rockefeller Republican, but just about the only person in the party who still used the term approvingly. She was not only pro-choice, but opposed

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most bans on partial birth abortions. She was not only pro-affirmative action but received an "A" on the issue from Jersey's Black Ministers Council. Indeed, just about the only thing she and Gingrich had in common was a love of tax cuts and an ability to unleash the traditional arrows in the GOP quiver—from talk radio outlets to right-wing interest groups like the NRA.

But Jersey's notoriously grumpy voters—with the second-highest per capita income in the nation, what are they so grumpy about?—turned on Whitman as they did Florio. Now, drive-time scream therapy is about *Christie.* "Which is killing you more—property tax or auto insurance?" blared the hosts recently on 101.5, the closest thing Jersey has to a statewide station.

While the governor isn't responsible for property taxes in Jersey's 556 communities, her decision to cut state income taxes by 30 percent—a plan devised by Steve Forbes—has alienated voters. They believe, mistakenly, that gaps in state aid and services meant local communities had to raise more revenues—sending their property taxes soaring. (In fact, Whitman is not really to blame. State aid to communities rose some 15 percent during her term. The real consequence of her tax cuts is the need for some dubious bond issues.) Still, voters say property taxes are their second greatest concern—ahead of crime and the economy.

The main worry, though, is auto insurance, which is to Jersey what Medicare is to Florida. New Jersey is the most densely populated state, which means there are bound to be more cars on the road, more traffic jams, more accidents—and the highest insurance rates in the nation. Whitman wants to lower rates by limiting damage claims for pain and suffering. Not a bad idea, but voters remain angry. "The two major issues are auto insurance and property taxes, period. And she's done nothing," says Doug Schoen who was the pollster for both President Clinton in 1996 and is now employed by Whitman's challenger McGreevey. That may seem like spin, but by a ratio of nearly 2 to 1, voters think McGreevey will do a better job handling insurance.

Whitman's troubles are compounded by the state's unique political culture. It has by far the strongest governor of any of the fifty states; the governor is one of the only state officials elected state wide. (The Attorney General, for instance, is appointed.) That means all resentments are focused on the governor. "People know who to blame if they're mad," Whitman told me. And Jersey is the only one of the nation's ten largest states without its own media market; instead Jerseyites rely on New York and Philadelphia TV. The result: challengers are little known until the end of a campaign, making races unpredictable.

Whitman finds herself in a particularly weird race. McGreevey is an unknown quantity who has never run for statewide office. An intense man who drinks ten cups of coffee a day, he had seemed to many the weakest of the three Democrats who ran for the party's nomination. He has a long paper trail: in addition to being a mayor, McGreevey sits in the state Senate and voted for both Florio's tax hikes *and* Whitman's cuts. For that reason, he seemed the perfect foil for the governor: she could blame him for the Florio era and call him a hypocrite if he went after her tax cuts.

But that hasn't happened. With their new angers, voters have already seemingly forgotten their old ones. And McGreevey has only obliquely criticized her tax cuts. Instead, he's a Democratic consultant's fantasy: with Forbes-like discipline, he focuses incessantly on auto insurance and property taxes with an occasional riff on education. His many panders aside—the other day he vowed never to close a mental hospital, to the cheers of the state employees who work there—he's molded himself as a fiscally conservative New Democrat.

There's a wild card, too. For the first time, a third party candidate for governor has qualified for matching funds. Libertarian Party nominee Murray Sabrin is a walking contradiction: he wants the government to ban abortions, and he calls for almost the complete abolition of government, but he eagerly accepts public financing for his campaign. Sabrin is currently polling around 6 percent in the race—a strikingly high figure that is likely to shrink when his name is one of many on Jersey's crowded ballot. But, in a close race, he could make the difference. Whitman has taken to dumping on Sabrin in her stump speeches for wanting to legalize drugs and prostitution. It's a sign that he's getting to her. Meanwhile, grassroot conservatives, once drawn to Christie because she was anti-Florio, have lost their zeal. The Christian Coalition will put out voter guides underscoring her social liberalism. The NRA types are lukewarm. Fully one-third of Jersey Republicans gave her poor ratings in a recent poll.

Then there is Bill Clinton. This race isn't about him. In the end the local issues of property tax and auto insurance dominate. But the landscape here and throughout the Northeast is increasingly Democratic in the Clinton '90s. Consider New Jersey. It used to be GOP friendly; it went for Nixon in '60 and '68 and Ford in '76, Reagan in '80 and '84 and Bush in '88. But Clinton has won it twice now, by a narrow margin in '92 and a landslide in '96. The performances of Dole and Bush were the two worst GOP presidential showings since the Depression, in part because Jersey and the Northeast—like the upper Midwest and the West Coast—have become so Democratic.

Whitman knows this. "For a Republican in a state that Bill Clinton carried by seventeen points last year, it's tougher," she says. When she won in 1993, along with GOP candidates in every major election that year, it was a bellwether of the GOP onslaught of 1994. Her fall could be equally telling. The GOP still rests its future on the promise of tax cuts. But in Jersey, voters seem to believe that tax cutting is a ponzi scheme: if they pay less to the governor, they'll pay more somewhere else. If Christie falls, or survives a near-death experience, it will be a bad omen not only for her soulmate Steve Forbes but for all Republicans in 1998.

MATTHEW COOPER is Deputy Chief of *Newsweek*'s Washington bureau.

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Closing the books on campus crime.

COLLEGE COP-OUT

By Robyn Gearey

You're a high-school senior, or maybe the parent of one, and you're weighing an application to the University of Pennsylvania. It's Ivy League all right, but it's an urban campus—right there in the heart of Philadelphia—and, well, it doesn't have the greatest reputation for safety. So you ask the school for a copy of its crime statistics. When the university obliges, you find that there were no murders, just a handful of rapes in the past three years, and a mere eighteen armed robberies in 1995. That doesn't sound quite as bad as you thought.

But it turns out the University of Pennsylvania has neglected to inform you of a few small things. Like the fact that, according to campus police logs, the number of armed robberies in 1995 was closer to two hundred. Like the fact that these statistics do not include the shooting of Patrick Leroy, a senior who was shot on one of the main walkways through campus on September 25, 1996. Why has Penn been so circumspect? Maybe because it's trying to keep up with the competition.

Schools neglect to report as many as 75 percent of the crimes committed on their campuses, according to one recent study. A handful of watchdog groups, led by the Pennsylvania-based Security on Campus (SOC), are trying to change this: in 1990, pressure from the group helped convince Congress to pass the Student Right-to-Know and Campus Security Act (CSA). The law requires schools to compile annual crime statistics from both campus police and other school officials, and then distribute the data to students and staff—as well as any prospective students or staff who request it. But based on interviews with activists, federal officials, and college administrators, it seems clear that only a small percentage of colleges are in full compliance with the law.

College officials complain, with some reason, that they face conflicting legal mandates: while CSA requires schools to make information about crime public, there is also the 1974 Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), which prevents schools receiving federal funding from releasing a student's educational record without his permission. Many college officials have interpreted that to extend to records of disciplinary proceedings concerning alleged crimes committed on campus. But two state supreme courts have ruled—quite rightly—that FERPA's privacy provisions don't preclude reporting anonymous statistics. And it's hard to believe the colleges have only the students' interests at heart when they fail to meet even the less controversial demands of the law. A 1996 study conducted by University of Cincinnati professor Bonnie Fisher and her colleague Chunmeng Lu found that just 37 percent of the 785 schools surveyed complied with the unambiguous requirement that crime statistics be made available to prospective students.

Recently the Department of Education has investigated a handful of schools accused of not complying with the law. According to the Department, Moorhead University, a Minnesota school with over 6,000 students, underestimated its annual crime rate and underreported illegal incidents at fraternities. After some back-and-forth between the school and the government, federal officials reexamined Moorhead's compliance several months later. Again, the university failed to pass muster: "We believe that the institution has not demonstrated a serious commitment to its obligations under the Campus Security Act and has discounted the seriousness of the issues raised by this office."

Soon the Education Department cited other schools: Virginia Tech had neither "accurately compiled" nor "accurately disclosed" crimes at its Blacksburg, Virginia, campus; in particular, the school had not disclosed an alleged rape in September 1994. Miami University of Ohio was cited for violating six separate CSA provisions: it had "fail[ed] to properly gather the required crime statistics from all pertinent sources," and its office of judicial affairs was not reporting crimes "as a general policy."

The University of Pennsylvania is one of two schools that remain under scrutiny (the other is Clemson University in South Carolina) and it's not hard to see why. According to *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, the school routinely fails to report crimes that occur on the streets and sidewalks connecting campus buildings as well as on property the school leases to businesses. For example, there are the discrepancies, reported by the *Inquirer*, between university police records on robberies and Penn's 1995 crime report. And then there is the fact that Penn excluded the shooting of Patrick Leroy from its report the following year. The university's explanation for the omission: technically speaking, the shooting was on a public walkway that traverses the campus.

Penn is also awaiting another judgment: the *Daily Pennsylvanian* newspaper reports that a former student is suing the school on grounds that university officials neither reported nor acted on a rape charge she filed with a university police officer in November 1994. The plaintiff claims that she was dissuaded from filing criminal charges because the university assured her it would handle the matter. According to the article, the university claims the rape never occurred, despite a statement from the officer at the time that a sexual assault complaint had been made.

One can certainly sympathize with college officials struggling to balance the requirement to release crime figures and the need to protect student privacy. Indeed, representatives from the colleges under investigation counter the Education Department's charges by saying that the reporting requirements are ambiguous. For example, CSA does not explicitly say that crimes commit-

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ted on public roads or walkways need to be reported—even if those paths are heavily traveled by students and within campus boundaries. And many college officials also realize that violating a student's right to privacy invites lawsuits.

But one reason to question the colleges' explanations is that many institutions actively discourage victims from reporting crimes—even to campus police. A 1992 survey of campus police and security personnel conducted by William Whitman, director of the Campus Safety and Security Institute, found that "students who were victims of reportable violent crimes" were encouraged "not to report the crimes to campus police/security. If the attacker was another student, they encouraged the victim to use the campus judicial system"—where, of course, it's easier to keep things quiet. Sheldon Steinbach, vice president and general counsel for the American Council on Education (ACE), denies that schools would do that, but Whitman reported that "several [college] Directors of Security were told they could look for a new job if they ever revealed the institution's true statistics."

The Education Department hasn't always helped matters, either. According to a March General Accounting Office report, "the Department has been slow to monitor compliance" with CSA and was over a year late in submitting a required report on campus crime to Congress. More seriously, GAO charged that, although the Department and independent auditors had identified violations at sixty-three colleges since the law's enactment, the Department failed to impose sanctions against any of the violators.

The Education Department blames these failures on a confusion over reporting requirements and difficulties getting complete data from colleges. However, Department officials have also contributed to the general confusion over what colleges are required to do under CSA. In April of 1994, the Department ruled that privacy laws should not prevent schools from releasing statistics of how many crimes occurred, so long as those statistics did not include names or other identifying details. Then, this July, the Ohio supreme court issued a broad ruling that disciplinary records do not qualify as educational records—and, thus, cannot be kept confidential. You'd think the Education Department would applaud such a ruling. Not so. Apparently alarmed that a state court had made too sweeping a rejection of the privacy provisions in FERPA, an Education Department official sent a letter to several colleges in Ohio, criticizing the court's ruling. Whatever the intent of that letter, the effect was to give colleges added credibility in their claim that FERPA laws trump crime reporting laws.

Congress may soon step in to rectify what the universities and the Department of Education have not. The reason has a lot to do with Ben Clery and his parents, Howard and Connie, who, in 1987, founded Security on Campus after Ben's sister Jeanne was beaten, raped, and murdered in her dorm room at Lehigh University. Through its sponsorship of the CSA, the group has almost single-handedly forced the issue of campus crime into the spotlight. Before CSA was passed, most colleges did not compile crime statistics at all: fewer than 5 percent submitted information to the FBI's voluntary crime reporting program.

Because many colleges still seem to be shirking their reporting responsibilities, Security on Campus is now promoting another measure: the Accuracy in Campus Crime Reporting Act (ACCRA), introduced this February in the House by Tennessee Republican John Duncan. In theory, ACCRA would clear up any lingering confusion over just what CSA covers. ACCRA would say explicitly which campus officials must document criminal incidents for inclusion in the CSA-required annual report. It also would require that colleges submit these statistics to the Education Department, which would make them available to the public. The bill's more controversial provisions would require colleges to maintain open crime logs and to make campus judicial hearings open to the public. And, for the first time, violations of the law would provoke mandatory sanctions: at least 1 percent of the school's federal funding per violation.

Congress held preliminary hearings on the proposal in July, in conjunction with the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, and more hearings are scheduled for later this month. But while the bill has fifty-nine cosponsors in the House, it has a formidable opponent in ACE, which represents some 3,600 postsecondary schools. "Some [of the law's proposals] are highly destructive," says ACE's Steinbach. Especially in hard-to-prosecute sexual assault cases, he argues, a campus court may be the only recourse available—and many victims even prefer it. "Students often want the judicial procedure because it's a confidential setting," says Steinbach, who is similarly troubled by the open-court requirement: "Imagine this," Steinbach says ominously, "you're alleging a rape and all the guy's frat brothers show up at the hearing. How willing are people going to be to testify if they're intimidated?"

On the issue of reporting crime, Steinbach is equally skeptical. These officials "aren't trained in how to determine what is a crime." Furthermore, he points out, "Some students may want to talk to someone [about an incident] but not report it. This could discourage students from seeking counseling" and, in cases where a crime is only reported to a school counselor, "threaten the doctor-patient relationship."

ACE has been lobbying hard against the bill, as have such smaller groups as the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators. In a four-page letter to ACCRA's sponsor, several of the measure's opponents wrote, "We are concerned that [ACCRA] may not provide the most effective solution" to campus crime problems. The bill's reporting requirements, the letter said, would have a "chilling effect on victims" and be "unduly burdensome" for college authorities. Having the Education Department act as a central repository for annual crime reports is "a waste of taxpayer money"; and opening records of criminal activity "will have a devastating impact" on accused students.

Concern over the proposal to open campus disci-

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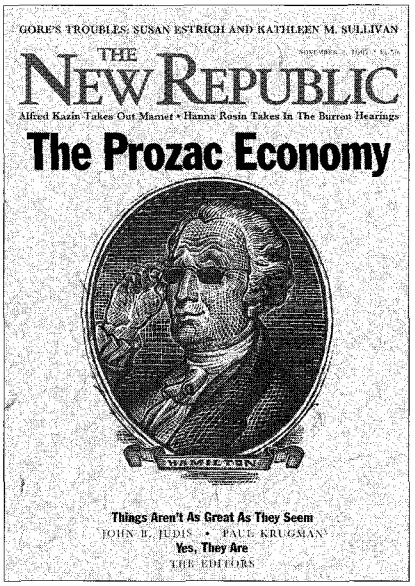
GORE'S TROUBLES: SUSAN ESTRICH AND KATHLEEN M. SULLIVAN
THE NEW REPUBLIC
Alfred Kazin Takes Out Mamet • Hanna Rosin Takes In The Burton Hearings
The Prozac Economy
Things Aren't As Great As They Seem
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THE EDITORS

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plinary proceedings to the public may be plausible, but opposition to the reporting of anonymous statistics seems pretty indefensible. Students and parents have a right to know how prevalent crime on campus is. Several courts have said so, as has Congress. Steinbach scoffs that "Security on Campus is obsessed with reporting as if reporting is a panacea for campus crime." But the disclosure laws are not about reducing crime—they're about making educated choices more effective. You'd think that's a goal universities and colleges would support. •

America's obsession with germs.

DON'T TOUCH THIS

By Hanna Rosin

On April 6, *PrimeTime Live* aired one of its periodic warnings to consumers. "Now a story about hidden dangers right in your own kitchen," Diane Sawyer intoned—then introduced Karen Peters, a trim, chipper young housewife. Peters was supposed to be the American everywoman, perhaps even a little better than that. She was the above average neat type, cleaning and wiping often during dinner, the narrator explained. "I'm compulsive," shrugged Peters, "What can I say?" Her husband agreed. "I like things very neat. That's why I married her," he joked.

The Peters household was chosen as one of ten to participate in a *PrimeTime* experiment. The *PrimeTime* team swabbed Mrs. Peters's drains, cutting boards, counters, refrigerator handles, sponges, and dishrags—then sent the samples to a lab for analysis. The results were alarming: scores of food-borne bacteria—salmonella, campylobacter, staphylococcus, listeria, and E. coli—lurked on all the kitchen surfaces. The highest count of E. coli came from Mrs. Peters's kitchen. "Of all ten?" asked the crumpled Peters. "Oh my God." To compound her mortification, *PrimeTime* subjected Mrs. Peters to yet another experiment. They covered her kitchen with a harmless powder called germ glow that mimics the spread of bacteria, but is visible only under ultraviolet light. When they turned on the light, the house was a war zone, with a fake germ dust staining the cutting board, her hands, the sink, the faucet handle, and "most worrisome," her son Preston's face. "Oh my gosh.... Oh my God. Oh Preston."

Welcome to America's new zone of germ warfare: your own kitchen. It used to be that germs invaded our shores from distant and unclean lands, through rhesus monkeys brought over from Africa, strawberries from Mexico, raspberries from Guatemala. But now we can't escape, because the deadly critters are hiding under our own roofs. "We've discovered a whole new range of hot zones," says Dr. Charles Gerba, a microbiologist at the University of Arizona and a consultant on the *PrimeTime Live* episode. "And most of them are in our kitchens." Run away to protect yourself: "It's safer to eat out than home," warns Gerba. The rhesus monkey has come home to roost.

The truth is, of course, we haven't "discovered" anything: the germs have always been there, even in our kitchen sink. We have in fact so thoroughly conquered germs this century that we've raised our life expectancy by twenty years. Yet somehow Americans are convinced they are under massive internal attack. In a recent *CBS News* poll, 39 percent of Americans said they are "very" conscious of germs. One in five has a close friend or family member who is "obsessed" with germs. Thirty-nine percent said their concern about germs has caused them to change their kitchen cleaning habits, according to a poll by the company 3M. City dwellers are especially skittish. More than half polled by CBS said that, in order to avoid contact with germs, they don't touch subway handles, public telephones, or airplane headrests.

What explains this new germophobia? The AIDS epidemic probably has something to do with it, although the HIV virus has never been perceived as a mainstream middle-class killer. Also, it is widely known that you can't get AIDS from a doorknob. There are more reported incidents of food poisoning these days, but that's mostly because the Centers for Disease Control and state health departments only recently started counting, and newspapers have started writing about it: the number of stories about germs has increased twentyfold in the last four years, according to a count by Farberware. But really, there are no more germs—certainly not more than a few years ago. There's just more reporting of germs in more locations than ever before. The problem can only be explained with a paradox: as a society gets richer and cleaner, it searches for dirt in ever more remote places.

In this manic search, the market is only too happy to help. Over the last year, a new category of "antibacterial"

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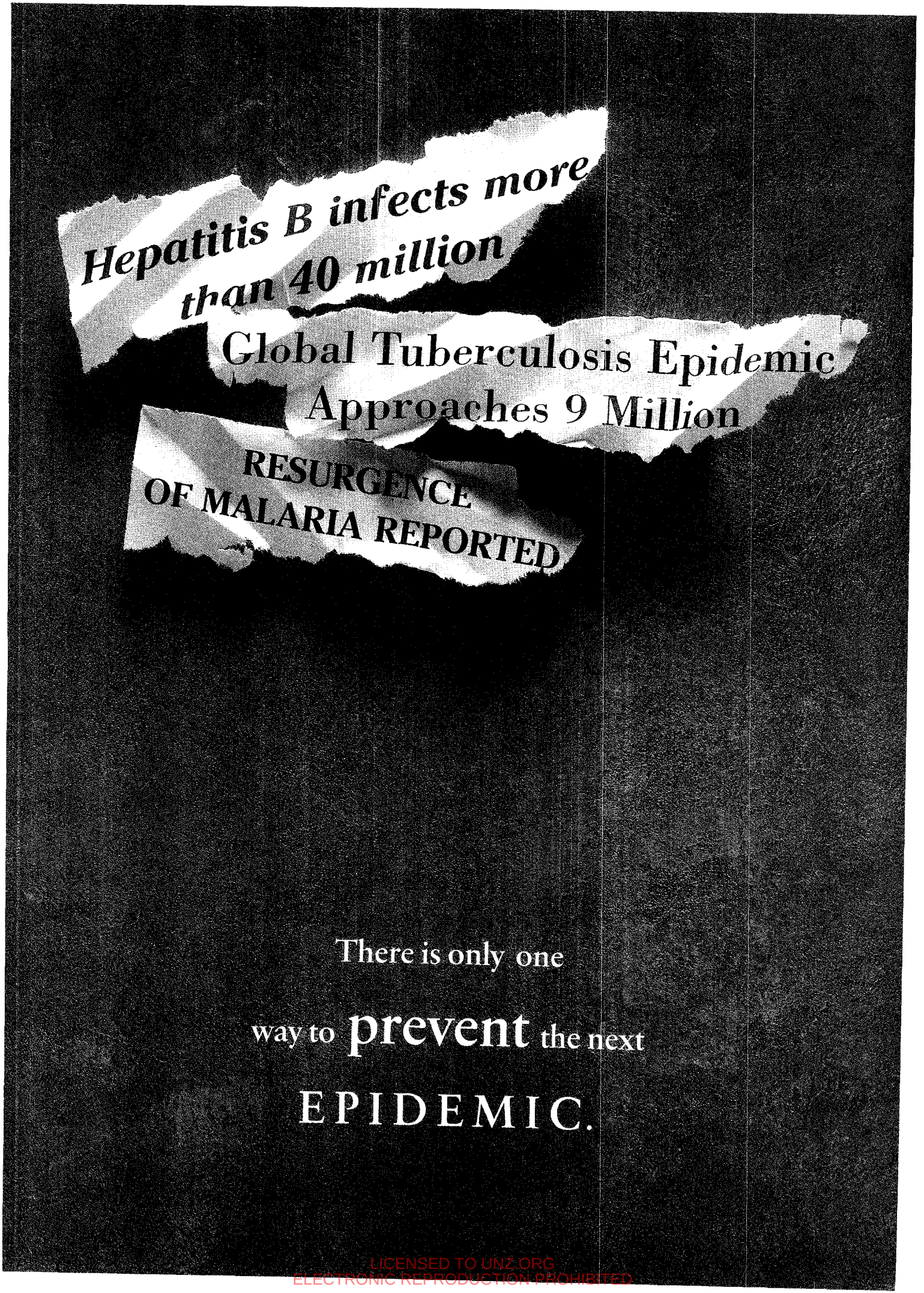
Hepatitis B infects more than 40 million
Global Tuberculosis Epidemic Approaches 9 Million
RESURGENCE OF MALARIA REPORTED
There is only one
way to prevent the next
EPIDEMIC.

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For more than 3 million years, the human race battled nonstop against microbes, or, as most of us know them, germs. And for millennia, microbes won. Waves of plague, typhus, influenza and other infectious diseases left death and suffering in their wake. For most of human existence, life expectancy was short and child mortality high.

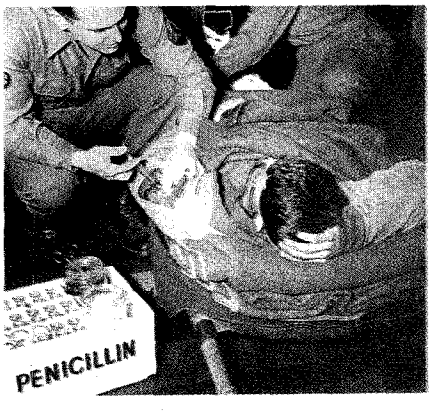
Finally, just 200 years ago, humankind scored its first victory when Dr. Edward Jenner successfully immunized 8-year-old farm boy James Phipps against smallpox. Another 132 years passed before the next real advance—the discovery of penicillin in 1928 by Dr. Alexander Fleming.

Fleming's discovery marked the dawn of modern medicine. But because it was impossible to make penicillin in any significant quantity, it wasn't widely available until 1944, when a company called Pfizer pioneered its mass production, just in time to save the lives of thousands of U.S. servicemen in WW II.

Over the next two decades, the dramatic success of penicillin and of subsequent vaccines and antibiotics led us to believe we could control or cure anything. After all, we'd seen polio virtually vanquished and had neutralized the threat of measles, whooping cough and diseases such as influenza and pneumonia that were once killers. By the late 1960's, when then U.S. Surgeon General William Stewart announced that we could "close the book" on infectious disease, he echoed a sentiment widely held throughout the country.

He could not have been more wrong. Today we face AIDS, Ebola, Lyme disease—diseases unrecognized a generation ago. And some infectious diseases, including tuberculosis and the more common bacterial pneumonia,

> We will win battles. But the war against microbes will never end.



> Pfizer's development of a method to mass-produce penicillin saved the lives of thousands of U.S. servicemen in WW II.

541	1590	1676	1683	1796	1862
Bubonic plague kills 10,000 daily	Microscope invented	Microorganisms seen for first time	First bacteria discovered	Edward Jenner discovers smallpox inoculation	Pasteur links germs to specific diseases for first time

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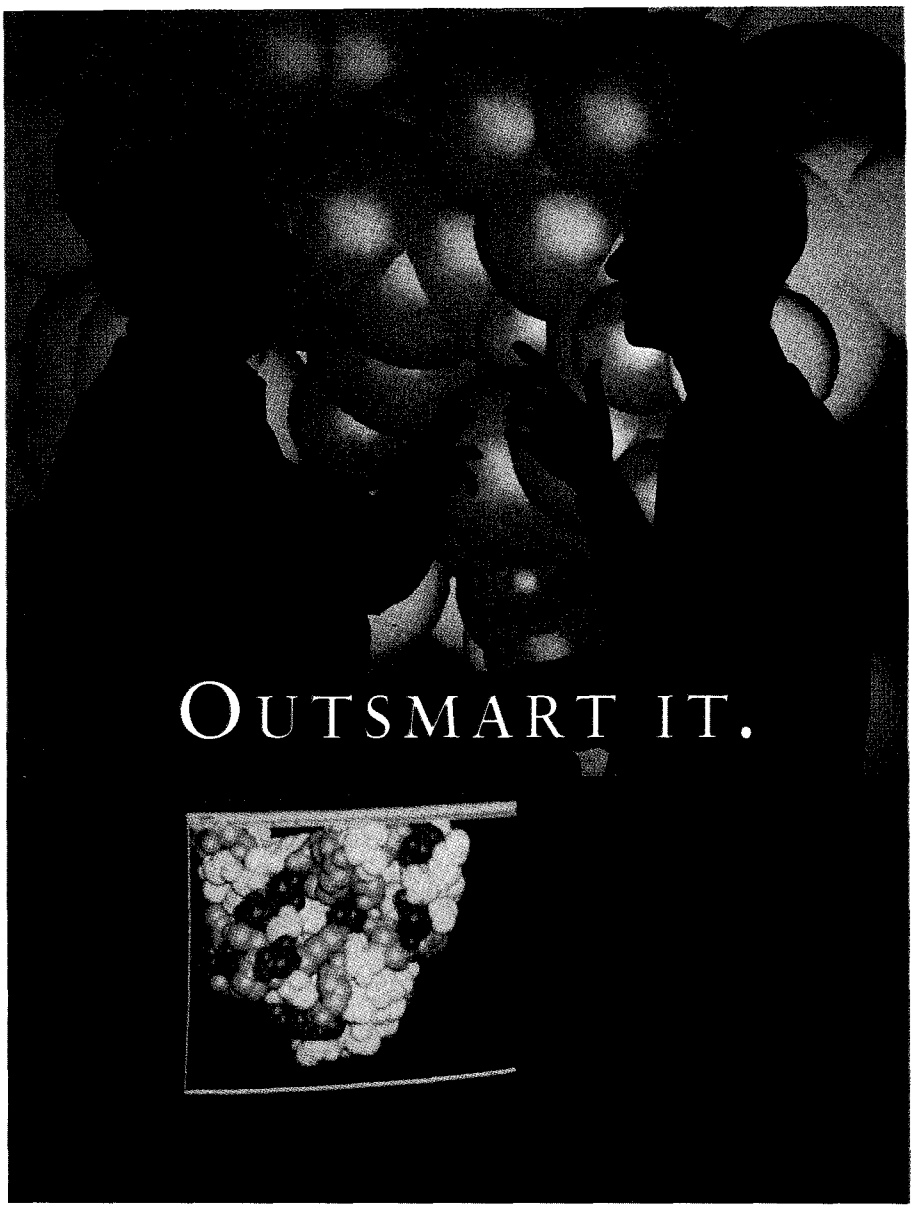

all too frequently mutate to form resistance to traditional antibiotics.

Kelvin Cooper, Ph.D., director of immunology and infectious disease research at Pfizer Inc's Central Research division in Groton, Connecticut, puts the current situation into perspective: "Microbes are the perfect evolutionary mechanisms. The lightning speed with which they can adapt gives them a great advantage in our efforts to control them. A single human generation spans about 20 years, but bacteria produce a new generation every 20 minutes. We can never underestimate their ability to evolve resistant strains."

Despite the Rambo-like survival skills of microbes, Steven C. Gilman, Ph.D., assistant director of Pfizer's immunology and infectious disease effort, is confident. "I don't agree with the apocalyptic view that the plague is once again at our door. But I do believe we must be preemptive. The failure in the 70's and 80's to realize how 'smart' bacteria can be planted the seeds of our current problems."

A decade ago, when many pharmaceutical companies radically cut back or entirely abandoned antibiotic development, Pfizer scientists continued the work that had made the company a renowned leader in anti-infective research.

> After the success of penicillin and other medicines, we started to believe we could cure anything.

1865	1892	1928	1944	1952
First surgical disinfectant reduces death rate from 45% to 15%	First virus discovered	Penicillin discovered, but only available in small amounts	First-ever mass-produced penicillin, from Pfizer	Salk discovers polio vaccine

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Ontario Science Centre
Toronto, Ontario, Canada
Sept. 27, 1997 through
Jan. 4, 1998

Liberty Science Center
Jersey City, New Jersey
Jan. 24, 1998 through
May 3, 1998

Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County
Los Angeles, California
May 23, 1998 through
Sept. 7, 1998

California Academy of Sciences
San Francisco, CA
Oct. 3, 1998 through
January 10, 1999

Will Microbes Invade A City Near You?

Be on the lookout for ***Microbes: Invisible Invaders... Amazing Allies,*** a new traveling museum exhibition sponsored by Pfizer. Experience the good, the bad and the funny-looking when the world of microbes comes to life at this kid-friendly, hands-on learning environment.

Exhibit will run through Fall 2002. For more information, please visit the *Microbes* Web page at www.pfizer.com/rd/microbes .

"Our programs are science driven," says Gilman. "While some companies thought the battle had been won, Pfizer listened to its scientists, who continued to be concerned about antibiotic resistance and believed our problems were far from over."

Today Pfizer's scientists are exploring novel strategies to hold bugs at bay. One of the most promising involves the use of new discoveries about genes to craft the next generation of cures.

With a California company, Microcide, Pfizer scientists are designing an antibiotic to target the genes essential to microbes' survival. "This started with a project to find all the essential genes bacteria need to live," explains Kelvin Cooper. "They've been found. Now we're designing drugs to attack them." Pfizer and Millennium Pharmaceuticals have formed a similar partnership, which is using genetic science to search for better antifungal medications.

Hopefully, after further research and development, these new forms of treatment will be available and humanity once again will have scored a major victory against infection.

But Steve Gilman adds a final word of caution: "We must always remain dedicated to research. It's the only way to stay one step ahead. We will win battles. But the war against harmful microbes will never end."

[We must always remain dedicated to research. It's the only way to stay one step ahead.]

1965	1979	1996
First synthetic antibiotic	World Health Organization proclaims the end of smallpox	Signs of microbial life found on Mars

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product has emerged on the shelves. From 1992 to 1997, the number of new antibacterial products introduced has increased from 36 to 140, according to *Product Alert* magazine. And that only includes ordinary household goods, such as soaps, cutting boards, and kitchen cleaners. By now, almost all companies that make plastic cutting boards have stopped producing anything but the more expensive antibacterial kind. Antibacterial soaps and cleaners have captured 50 percent of their $2.1 billion market. More obscure products are showing up as well. Over the next year, Farberware will introduce a line of fifty new antibacterial gadgets, ranging from pizza cutters to nail brushes to cheese graters. Pens and candles are under consideration. More than half of Americans already say they go out of their way to buy antibacterial products whenever available, while 93 percent say they use at least one such product.

It is already possible to spend most of your day in germ-free comfort. You can get a good night's sleep on an antibacterial pillow, snuggled under an antibacterial blanket, brush your teeth with antibacterial toothpaste, take a shower with antibacterial soap, dry off with an antibacterial towel, pull on your antibacterial socks and underwear, eat breakfast on your antibacterial tray, say goodbye to Spot in his antibacterial dog bed, give little Suzie her antibacterial toy, grab a cookie from an antibacterial jar, spray the bus seat (and your office phone) with antibacterial cleaner, then come home, and chop up some celery with your antibacterial knife.

This is not the first, or even the second, time America has become obsessed with cleanliness. The history of American social and economic progress could be told as a tale of progressively cleaner kitchens. The first big push came after the Civil War, when armies of health reformers swept through city slums. They confused germs with filth, but never mind, they meant well. The point was to teach everyone the new standards of American middle-class cleanliness, so rich and poor alike could participate in the march of progress. Booker T. Washington preached the "gospel of the toothbrush" to former slaves. For women, the crusade meant rising "above the beaten paths of cookery and needlework," as reformer Harriette Plunkett put it. Later on, the discipline of home economics added a pseudo-scientific twist, as pamphlets from the '30s explained to the twentieth-century housewife that a "pin-point of dust" could yield "three thousand living organisms." (Back then there were hucksters too; William Radam became a millionaire in 1890 selling a drop of wine in hot water labeled "Microbe Killer Number One.") And soap companies urged Americans to coach new immigrants on "American ways of keeping house," as an ad for Fels-Naptha soap explained.

The apex came, of course, in the 1950's, when the middle class fantasies of earlier ads became an American reality. Suddenly the country became the cleanest in the world, building the most bathrooms, using the most water. Like today, new household gadgets multiplied by the dozens, from Tide, promising the "cleanest clean," to the most revolutionary, the garbage disposal. Ads featured happy housewives beaming near their sparkling new blenders; all was well in the world.

If the old movement for cleanliness made Americans feel hopeful about their future, the new push is likely to bring on terror and depression. The old one united the country in a national program of uplift; the new one isolates us in our squalid homes. Charles Gerba is one of a handful of researchers in America pioneering a new field called household microbiology, which studies the home as the source of most food-related illnesses. Gerba is a guy who sprays public benches with disinfectant before a picnic, and turns on public rest room faucets with his elbow. Spend a few hours with his research and you too will become suspicious of everything you touch. He passes his time swabbing gas station toilets, hotel pillows, office coffee cups, and his own washing machine. His research papers have titles like "A Microbial Survey of Office Coffee Cups" and "Enteric Contamination of Public Restrooms."

Gerba's work has the strange and disheartening effect of seeming to reverse years of progress. It is much safer, he says, to eat a sandwich in your bathroom than your kitchen, because years of scrubbing bathrooms with disinfectants have made the toilet the cleanest place in the house. Neglected kitchens, meanwhile, have become hotbeds for germs. Bachelors keep perhaps the cleanest houses, he says, because they never clean, while the rest of us wipe furiously with our microbe-soaked sponges and spread the germs everywhere. His latest laboratory is the laundry room, and based on initial results, things look pretty ugly. "It's a lot worse than I ever thought," he says about washing machines. "Fecal bacteria and hepatitis survive the average washing. Even salmonella survives to some extent, and spreads from one dirty item to the rest of the clothes." He suggests running the machine empty with just bleach and water between every load to kill the lingering germs. It's enough to make a housewife smash her blender.

Household microbiology doesn't have academic respectability yet, but companies are happy to fund its development. For the most part, the companies try to stay away from the unpleasant side of the subject (or so they claim). Purell is one of the most innovative new products, a waterless, portable "hand sanitizer" mixing alcohol and moisturizer that can be applied to the hands like baby lotion. Purell is made by Gojo Industries of Ohio. It used to be manufactured exclusively for hospitals, nursing homes, and food establishments. Then a few years ago, Gojo got a flood of calls from health care professionals eager to have the product for their personal use, says Paul Alper, until recently the spokesman for Gojo.

Gojo's new target audience is "anybody with an 'on the go' lifestyle." By Alper's description, that means an updated Norman Rockwell America: women who want to clean up between diaper changes, or after trips to a fast food joint. Men traveling with kids on weekends to

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the ball park or picnics or fishing trips. Or, he adds as an aside, professionals eating a sandwich at their desk who can't get to a bathroom to wash their hands, or who are sitting in the window seat of the plane, or who shake lots of hands. Tipper Gore even plugged the product during her frenzy of hand pumping during the last election.

But what are we really talking about here? Harried professionals shuttling around on business trips, eating at their desks, too busy to spare five minutes to go to the bathroom to wash their hands. Politicians doing their tiresome duties. Purell is merely a symptom of a beleaguered, stressed-out life, not an antidote. The advertising campaign does not feature Sunday family outings at Lake Placid. It shows an ominous dark circle at the center of which is either a pair of scissors or a phone receiver. If you look closely, you realize the circle is supposed to be a petri dish under a microscope. The object shown is made up of bunched bacteria surrounded by other floating globs of germs. "What did you pick up today?" reads the caption, and the following text explains: "Germs pop up in surprising places. So chances are you pick up handfuls every day." Purell's television ad starts out focusing on a single germ, then pulls back to reveal it's on an ATM machine, as a narrator says, "Who knows what you're in line for." Alper doesn't see the problem: "We got *Adweek*'s best of the month for that one," he says.

DRAWING BY VINT LAWRENCE FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

Other companies have gotten in trouble for their ad campaigns. This year, the Environmental Protection Agency, which regulates pesticides, disciplined at least four companies for misleading advertising. The first was Hasbro, the company that makes Playskool toys. In 1995, Hasbro test-marketed an antibacterial high chair. The chair was made with Microban, a germ killer patented by a North Carolina company. Microban incorporates a substance called triclosan into the polymers of the plastic, and creates a kind of protective coating. Hasbro originally advertised that the product "protects your child from germs and bacteria." But the EPA claimed Microban protects the toy, not the child, and fined Hasbro $120,000. Now the toys say "Microban—built in to protect the toy; inhibits the growth of bacteria." Hasbro officials are unrepentant. Spokesman Wayne Charness complained that the fine was "unwarranted," as he told *The Chicago Tribune* in April. "It's a nuance of language. We think we've been making appropriate claims from the beginning."

Most scientists point to a more basic problem: germs may be transferred from hard surfaces to hands, but there is no scientific proof that this mode of transmission of the germ causes infections. And most infections parents worry about, such as colds and flus, are caused by viruses, not bacteria. Dr. Elizabeth Scott is another household microbiologist now working as a food and hygiene consultant in Boston. She is very worried about the home as a source of disease. But she is also very dubious about the toys. In day care centers, protecting toys might make sense, but kids at home wallow in their own germs and spit them on their siblings. "To put things in perspective," she says, "I have three children, and they all go out and start eating dirt. We should focus on where the real risks are. All this hype doesn't teach consumers much."

Microban supporters complain that most scientists don't understand how triclosan works, but that's because the manufacturers don't publish most of their studies. It's routine for companies to keep innovations secret, but this secrecy serves mainly to foil critics. If Microban wants to silence its critics, it should look to Lysol as its model.

Lysol is known among scientists for its thorough studies, published in scientific journals and subjected to peer review. In 1991, a lab that tests Lysol products chose a day care center on Long Island for an experiment. For the first year, the researchers tracked infections and illnesses, and counted how many times the children went to the doctor, or missed school. The second year they subjected the staff to a Microbiology

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101 course. They told the teachers to wash the toys with disinfectant, the bus drivers to wipe down the seats and handrails, and showed the janitorial staff the hot spots to clean. It was a low-tech, simple solution. And it worked. Infections dropped by a quarter, respiratory illnesses dropped 37 percent, doctor visits dropped, and the kids missed half as much school. If Microban had a study like this to show, skeptics would keep quiet.

Another company disciplined by the EPA is 3M, maker of antibacterial O-Cel-O sponges. Launched in May 1996, the company advertised that the sponge "Kills Germs!" and "Kills Germs that cause food-borne Illness." But then the EPA had to remind the company that the sponge only kills germs in the sponge, and that the most the company could prove was that the sponge didn't smell as bad. Still, 3M didn't learn. In June of this year, Colleen Douglas, of 3M's home care products division, was quoted saying, "it's a fabulous product for the health conscious consumer." Spokeswoman Mary Auvin added, "People would rather use our sponges ... than measure out bleach and pesticides." But that was precisely the EPA's point! The recommended way to sanitize a kitchen counter is to wipe it down with bleach. A sponge can't protect the counter.

Even Gerba, who did much of the research for 3M, thinks the company's claims might be misleading. "I don't know how long it's effective. The label says hundreds of uses, but I'm not sure what the limit is." Lysol tested an antibacterial sponge, and rejected the idea. "We couldn't find that it had any appreciable benefit," says researcher Joe Rabino. "We had people use them in their homes and found there was still lots of bacteria there. In a consumer's mind, they see 'antibacterial' and think it's killing germs, not just resisting odors. It's misleading."

Scientists are most dubious about Farberware's myriad gadgets. Take the pizza cutter. "The cheese may get behind the wheel and drip onto the handle," explains Jeff Siegel, executive vice president. "Pizza cutter!" says an incredulous Dr. Scott. "Why would you need an antibacterial pizza cutter? That is definitely not a high-risk food. The pizza is cooked at such a high temperature it's virtually scorched. This is what I mean by jumping on the bandwagon." To prove their products' effectiveness, Farberware sent me a brief lab report from the ACTS Testing Lab in Buffalo, New York. The report concludes that Microban cutting boards "prevent and eliminate bacterial contamination." But even researchers at ACTS are not sure what that conclusion means. "I don't know how long it lasts," says Laura McKenrick. "They claim it's a lifetime effect, but how can that be when the product keeps leaching out?" Research conditions, she admits, are less than ideal. Companies don't send a board that's been used in a home for two years. "We're lucky if [the manufacturer] drops the product off at our doorstep and needs the results in two days. These are not those very, very involved EPA studies."

After the first few EPA penalties, the makers of Microban have instructed clients to take a standard fallback position. "It doesn't replace good hygiene," says Siegel. "You still have to wash the products. It's just an added measure of protection." Or, in another variation: "It's just another measure of protection," says Glenn Cueman, of Microban. "You still can't disregard other precautions." But this carefully staged retreat only makes matters worse. Dividing daily life into infinite added layers of protection only fuels the paranoia. You could always concoct a scenario where a child might pick up germs from a sponge, or a dish, which might cause infection. Even with laundry loads of bleach and water, Microban, Lysol spray, pizza cutters, and dog beds, a mother could never be completely sure. "The mentality being sold is you have to kill all the bugs," says Bill Jarvis, of the CDC, "and no matter what product you have, you'll never kill all the bugs."

Antibacterial products are designed to play into that peculiarly American inability to process risk. Taking constant precautions against food-borne illness makes sense for the very old, or the very young, or the immunologically fragile. But for those "on the go" healthy adults, the major disease risks from ordinary contact with ordinary everyday surfaces and substances are basically zero. And if they do catch a bug, it will probably take the form of mild diarrhea or a common cold.

Dr. Philip Tierno, a microbiologist at New York University Medical Center, may deserve the blame for starting the hysteria. A few years ago, he began swabbing taxis, pay phones, movie theater seats, and restaurant chairs—and publishing the results in newspapers. Tierno himself wipes the receivers of public phones with alcohol swabs, uses paper towels to open the doors of rest rooms, and never rides the subway. He has studied Microban products, and has high hopes for them. "I wish the toys had been around when my kids were young," he says.

Tierno does not have high hopes for the press, however. "You probably decided on the story you were going to write before you got here," he tells me. "You will write that while these products have some usefulness, all of these problems can be solved with common sense solutions, like washing hands." And what would he write? "I would say that yes, while there are perhaps a few products that may escape one's impression of usefulness, there is no doubt as to the efficacy of many of them. They are extra tools, that's all."

Actually, Tierno is wrong on both counts. My advice would be, perhaps, when you are old, and your immune system is shot, cook your hamburgers to 160 degrees and wash your hands for sixty seconds or more. But until then turn on bathroom sinks with your hands, and eat rare meat if you want to. If you get sick, stay home from work, and return two days later. If Tierno thinks you slothful, so be it. He can go eat his sandwich in his bathroom. •

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BOOKS & The Arts

Stanley Kauffmann on Films

The Rake's Progress

The year is 1977 when **Boogie Nights** (New Line) begins. Eddie Adams is a 17-year-old busboy in a San Fernando Valley nightclub when he is spotted by Jack Horner, a director of porno films. Horner, with the intuition that made him wealthy, senses potency and potential in Eddie. He quickly learns that Eddie has already earned some money sexually, so little persuasion is needed. Horner soon makes Eddie into a big porno star, under the name Dirk Diggler.

For us, however, he remains, most of the time, Eddie, a basically sweet naïf, doing what is asked of him sexually like an obliging peasant youth in Sade, except that he becomes mildly famous and well-off. His new life brings along many new people. First, there is Horner's girlfriend, a porno star called Amber Waves—in fact, she is Eddie's first on-camera lay. Then there is Rollergirl, a porno playmate who doesn't take off her rollerskates for sex. And there is a large miscellany of others in and around the business, almost all of them druggies.

Some of the group's stories are tracked through the screenplay, with or without Eddie's involvement, much as was done in *Nashville* or *Pulp Fiction*. This braiding device entails a bit of padding; still, as the film blasts along from 1977 to 1983, it cracks open its world. The finish fits out most of the strands with relatively pleasant conclusions. Only the ending of Eddie's story is a touch too neat. (And, too, there are a couple of murders along the way that the picture simply shrugs off.)

Boogie Nights was written and directed by Paul Thomas Anderson. This is remarkable. Anderson's only previous film, *Hard Eight*, was one of those strained independent films whose threadbare central idea wears out very soon. With *Boogie Nights* Anderson may have had help from the people who are always around an expensive production, but it has the temper of one person's ingenuity and energy. It's an extraordinary step forward from his first picture—a 152-minute film with almost no sags.

All this in spite of the fact that Anderson never quite achieves his presumable chief aim. This picture moves us into a terrain where the moral scale is unabashedly different from the rest of the world's, even the part that patronizes porn, and it asks us to accept that scale: its ambitions, judgments, loyalties, even its annual "Oscars." This acceptance never quite happens for us. When a porno production man finally kills his wife, who has frequently coupled with other men in public, and then kills himself, it's hard to feel the pathos that's intended. Why didn't he shoot her before? Or why did he bother now? When Amber, a divorcée, goes to law for visitation rights with her son and loses, her heartache doesn't quite reach us. Who would want a child to spend much time in her environment?

Yet, despite the film's distance from us, we are held. In part, of course, there's the sexual titillation: whether or not we're sated with porn, the way that those films are made still catches us. Mostly, however, our interest seems to connect with a shift in standards. Moral criteria have been replaced by stylistic ones. To put it another way, if *Boogie Nights* were poorly made and acted, its materials would make it intolerably tawdry. But it's so well done that we keep watching.

Film historians may already be at their computers, tapping away at this transition from the sin-suffer-repent of the past to the contemporary acceptance of almost anything if it's sufficiently well made. Of course there have been precedents in other arts for centuries. (Why is Courbet's *The Origin of the World*, a depersonalized closeup of female genitalia, hung in a museum instead of being copied and sold with *Hustler*? Because it's beautifully painted.) Now this license through quality reaches the most widely seen art on earth. What does this transition imply or—dread word—forebode? Tune in next century.

As is, *Boogie Nights* dazzles along. Two scenes stand out memorably. After Amber loses her plea for her son, she is in her lush bedroom talking with Rollergirl, who has problems of her own. The younger one, in tears, says she needs a mom, and the older one (not *that* old) hugs her as they cry and nestle together. The suggestions in this well-written scene are subtle and evocative. And there's a long scene toward the end where Eddie, temporarily in money trouble, takes part in a drug delivery and robbery. The place is the home of the rich Rahad Jackson, who is on a giggling high throughout, in his briefs and open robe. The scene is punctuated by the firecrackers that his Chinese companion keeps set-

FILMS WORTH SEEING

In and Out. *Only if you want to see how homosexuality has been completely ingested as a Hollywood subject. Otherwise, a routine assembly-line farce. (Reviewed 10/20/97)* **In the Company of Men.** *Neil LaBute's debut film sparkles with bright dialogue and precise acting—and cruelty. Modeled on Restoration comedy, a present-day prank of two men on a woman reveals hidden aspects of all concerned. (9/1/97)* **Mrs. Brown.** *Did or didn't Queen Victoria have a lengthy affair with her Scottish groom John Brown? No answer here, but a lot of well-acted, well-designed enjoyment. (8/4/97)* **A Self-Made Hero.** *An impostor in occupied France floats his way to success and discloses curious aspects of his country's wartime behavior. (9/22/97)*—**SK**

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ting off; and the inevitably bloody outcome hovers invisibly in the air waiting to materialize. The whole scene plays like an insane ballet.

Anderson directs throughout with verve and fluency. His very enthusiasm spurs his talent to carry him over dangers. For instance, the several wild parties. Little is deader on screen than most wild parties, but Anderson makes them smooth, hip bacchanals, with variegated people winding through on their hedonistic way.

His ability, always clear, is at its clearest in his casting and directing of actors. Mark Wahlberg gives Eddie the precise note of unvicious amorality. (At the end we glimpse the reason for Eddie's success—his prodigious organ. At least we are to believe it's his.) Burt Reynolds seems to have invested his whole career in preparation for Jack Horner. Ease used as ethic, a seriousness that is meant to be transparent, all the qualities that marked his unctuously inveigling performances lead directly to Jack, a man of a dependability that is limited only by self-interest, with an embrace that is part smother.

Julianne Moore, already distinguished not only by her gifts but by her daring choice of roles, is rightly regal as Amber. She is the queen of herself, moving through her life with the assurance of hermetically sealed values. Heather Graham, the Rollergirl, is pleasant as a human Barbie doll. Every other part, large or lesser, is cast precisely and taken to its utmost. A particular salute to the English actor, Alfred Molina, as Rahad, a carefully designed frenetic performance.

Three more salutes. Robert Elswit gets right to the texture of scene after scene, and thus gives the film itself a seductive luridness. Dylan Tichenor, the editor, knows exactly what we want to be looking at, a moment before we know it ourselves. And the music, old and new, tended by Michael Penn, is a jet propulsion under it all. •

Mindy Aloff on Dance

Enigma Variations

The choreographer Frederick Ashton—one of the greatest ballet masters in history—was born in 1904, in Guayaquil, Ecuador, to a couple who were natives of England. Around the age of three, he moved with his family (including three older brothers and a younger sister) to Lima, Peru, where he stayed until going to boarding school in England at the age of 15. Ashton never returned to Lima, yet over the course of his long career in the theater (which began rather late, at age 18, with ballet classes from Léonide Massine) he retained indelible memories of the dazzlingly stylish women on Lima's boulevards, of the public religious processions, and of the melancholy songs of his half-Inca nurse, which—as Julie Kavanagh recounts in her new life of Ashton—he recalled into old age.

Ashton's off-stage life was, from childhood, sexually complex, emotionally turbulent, and socially ranging. Yet even as he became an increasingly jaded critic of individuals, he demonstrated an innocent's captivation with feminine beauty, with grand public ceremony, and with societal allure. His ballets founded one fairytale kingdom after another—sometimes obviously, in ballroom settings, sometimes indirectly, as in the happy barnyard and farmhouse of what may be his wittiest and most ebullient work, *La Fille mal gardée* (1960).

By the end of his life, Ashton was ensconced literally among royalty. Shortly before his death in 1988, he found himself performing "a sort of mock belly dance" with the 88-year-old Queen Mother at a party during a week-long visit to Sandringham. His ballets contain few kings and queens as such; but when Ashton chose to portray them wearing crowns, he did so seriously and with unshadowed appreciation. But then, as a choreographer and, later, as the director of the Royal Ballet, he was entrenched in issues of governance and autocratic power. One can hardly oversee the making of ballets, and certainly not the day-to-day continuity of an entire ballet company, without pondering issues of private passion and public obligation, or of how to keep a kingdom stable against threats from without or, more difficult, dissension within.

Secret Muses: The Life of Frederick Ashton
by Julie Kavanagh
(Pantheon, 647 pp., $35)

Like Balanchine, Ashton had to wrestle with certain brutal facts: ballet, which is only good when it is great, is necessarily a meritocracy. By virtue of its physical challenges, it demands young bodies, and by virtue of its musical and allusive complexities, it demands old wisdom. Also like Balanchine, Ashton looked back to Petipa and Ivanov as his models, which meant that he was committed to the ballerina as the centerpiece of classical power. This, despite the fact that when Ashton woke up in bed with someone, that someone was usually a man. Kavanagh recounts his life exhaustively. To have been able to construct fantasy kingdoms ruled over by women while in the throes of love affairs with men was one of Ashton's triumphs, attesting to the strength of his devotion to classical ballet's tradition and technique. As Jerome Robbins said of Balanchine, who was able more easily to bring his emotional impulses and his artistic impulses together by marrying his ballerinas, Ashton's most enduring marriage was to ballet itself.

Within that marriage, Ashton's luck among women was nothing short of sensational. At the age of 12, he saw Anna Pavlova dance in *The Fairy Doll*, and for the rest of his life she served him as the mother of all muses, prompting even Margot Fonteyn to say that "I always felt that Fred was seeing Pavlova and that I wasn't living up to her by any means." (Pavlova also predicted his success as a choreographer.) Like Balanchine, he saw Isadora Duncan perform late into her career, but fate permitted Ashton to recognize what was great about her, and to draw on those qualities of musicality and headstrong emotion over the full course of his career. His own initial ambitions as a choreographer were fondly and fertilely encouraged by Marie Rambert, who commissioned ballets from him for the Ballet Club at the Mercury Theater; by Bronislava Nijinska, who took him on as her student of classical technique and her apprentice in choreography while he performed for the Ida Rubinstein company in Paris during the late 1920s, where Nijinska was the resident choreographer; by the designer Sophie Fedorovitch, his longtime soulmate and colleague; by Lydia Lopokova, a former ballerina with Diaghilev's *Ballets Russes*, who, with her husband John Maynard Keynes and a handful of other intellectuals, among them the blisteringly brilliant conductor Constant Lambert, sponsored Ashton's choreography for the Camargo Society; and by the American-born millionairess Alice von Hofmannsthal, who introduced him to international high

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society, fell in love with him and, for a time, was his lover.

Ashton's long, generally productive, but frequently barbed relationship with Ninette de Valois, the indomitable founder of what was to become known as The Royal Ballet, can also be looked on in a positive light, since his clashes with de Valois seem to have strengthened his own sense of what he wanted from ballet. Kavanagh doesn't exactly indict de Valois for Ashton's forced retirement as the Royal's director in 1970, a position that he had taken over from de Valois in 1963, and in which he had served with high distinction: expanding the Petipa repertory, burnishing and expanding the Balanchine wing, overseeing the company's absorption of Rudolph Nureyev, bringing in Nijinska to stage her masterpieces *Les Noces* and *Les Biches*, bringing in the long-shunned Antony Tudor to make his first ballet, *Shadowplay*, for the Royal, as well as turning out some of the greatest ballets of his own career, among them a pristine staging of Satie (*Monotones*), a Victorian valentine to Mendelssohn by way of Shakespeare (*The Dream*), and a lambent homage to Elgar (*Enigma Variations*). Still, Kavanagh uses secondhand gossip to plant the idea that de Valois was the evil demon of the plan, which, from Ashton's point of view in later years, she was. This treatment of de Valois is one of the points in *Secret Muses* where Kavanagh is, in effect, attempting to prove that her biography is on Ashton's side. Given the murky nature of most theatrical feuds, however, one is advised to proceed to her conclusion with caution. De Valois, who is in her hundredth year, contests it.

Kavanagh's title can be interpreted, on one level, to mean those figures in Ashton's love life—most yet not all of them dancers, most yet not all of them men—who inspired the emotional and dramatic trajectories of his choreography. On another level, however, it can be interpreted to refer to his very way of thinking: to the secret signs of beauty and hope that characterize romance. And on another level it can be interpreted to mean *all* his sources of inspiration, which, to a new audience of balletgoers and readers, are secret in that they are no longer in the public eye, or topics in the gossip columns, or ready frames of reference in the theater.

For anyone under 40 who attended the Royal's production of Ashton's two-act *Cinderella* at the Met during the company's exciting visit to New York this past summer, Margot Fonteyn, the most frequently discussed proponent of the ballet's title role during Ashton's lifetime, would be a secret muse. A critic such as myself—who, of the two Cinderellas I saw, far preferred Darcey Bussell—cannot rely on memories of Fonteyn's shapely acting and her dramatically nuanced dancing to make the case as to why Bussell seemed generous and illuminating, while Leann Benjamin, a limpid dancer, seemed to come to the character cold. One must begin one's statement of appreciation as if Fonteyn never existed, which, for much of the sold-out houses at the performances I attended, she doesn't. To hold a memory of Ashton's casts under Ashton's direction is indeed to be a keeper of secrets.

Courtesy Alfred A. Knopf

FREDERICK ASHTON AND MARGOT FONTEYN IN *FAÇADE*, 1941

For a ballet master who did not regularly teach technique class (he appears to have lacked the scientific zest required for it), Ashton was very lucky in his ballerinas. They included Alicia Markova, Tamara Karsavina, Alexandra Danilova, Moira Shearer, Pamela May, Beryl Grey, Svetlana Beriosova, Antoinette Sibley, and Lynn Seymour. In at least one respect, in fact, he was luckier than Balanchine: in addition to being able to work with many ballerinas of distinction, Ashton was also able to rely on a *prima ballerina assoluta* for three entire decades. Margot Fonteyn was the protégée of both Ashton and de Valois, who recognized her potential well before he did.

For transcontinental theatergoers in the '40s, '50s, and '60s—as for Ashton's own dancers during that time—Fonteyn was more than Ashton's principal public muse and the standard-bearer of English classical style. She was something close to the spiritual queen of England, encapsulating the qualities of beauty, decorum, warmth, modesty, high spirits, and nobility that marked the culture of the Edwardian period at its best—that is, the culture of Ashton's mother's youth, to which he continually turned in his work. Ashton crystallized this image of Fonteyn in 1953, when, on the occasion of the coronation of Elizabeth II, he made a ballet called *Homage to the Queen*, in which Fonteyn, as Queen of the Air, was granted the prestigious crowning entrance, then lifted high over a living tableau formed by the corps, with her sister Queens—of the Waters, of Fire, and of the Earth—saluting her from the corners of the stage.

Unlike most historical queens, Fonteyn got to triumph as a princess, too, in her incandescent performances as Aurora in *The Sleeping Beauty*. Yet it was in the role of Odette, Queen of the Swans, that Fonteyn most fully articulated an ideal of monarchical authority. In 1963, Ashton rechoreographed the ballet's last act to spell this out. The heart of it is a passage in which Odette leads her flock away from the lake to safeguard them against von Rothbart's vehemence, guiding them, line by line, to safety. After each of these missions, she breaks off to comfort the figure of the stricken Siegfried, touching him each time with more enveloping tenderness and ardor. This is a queen of dreams, who attempts to rescue everyone according to his or her specific need, racing against the clock to provide now passion, now compassion. Alas, there is no one to mother her; the closest mother surrogate she has is the lake itself, formed of her dead mother's tears—the lake in which she

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and Siegfried merge.

If there is a more poignant emblem in ballet for the profound loneliness attendant on, and the emotional stamina required by, the position of full artistic responsibility, I should like to know it. For many dancegoers, Fonteyn's Odette has remained the standard of what a queen might be: at once fully vulnerable, an incarnation of beauty, and a student of Clausewitz. In a recent issue of *Ballet Review* Wendy Ellis, a notator of Ashton's ballets, is quoted as saying about this elegiac tone poem: "My father, who doesn't know anything about ballet, used to wait for the last act because he said it was the most magical thing he had ever seen."

Ellis's father appears to belong to a vanishing race of theatergoers. A new generation tends to treat the performing arts with a wariness about being suckered in that sometimes approaches cynicism, and an impulse to analyze and to "demystify" images in order to prove that they really add up to tricks of the theater, or to nothing. This has made for smart commentary, yet in its defiant disillusion it has also contributed to the decline of magic in ballet-making, especially the kind of necromancy in which Ashton excelled, where the very minutiae of geometrical formations, of upbeats and downbeats, of *épaulement* (carriage of the shoulders) and positions of the fingers, trail specific allusions and describable lyric suggestions, or, rather, secrete them: for instance, the moment at the end of another Fonteyn vehicle, *Scènes de ballet*, when most of the cast arrange themselves downstage in an architectural formation while, in an upstage corner, the ballerina stands on the thigh of her kneeling cavalier in a cameo quotation from *Swan Lake*.

Scènes de ballet, reportedly Ashton's favorite among all his works, is an impersonal syllogism of the Cecchetti brand of classical technique that he learned from Massine, Rambert, and Nijinska. (This rigorously structured and minutely classified pedagogy—on whose steps, phrasing, and postures Ashton drew throughout his career—is notable for its strict observance of ballet's five positions, for its textbook deportment, for its astonishingly faceted *petit allegro* vocabulary, and for the braided tensions it produces in the dancing body, giving it the look of late Hellenistic sculpture.) Like some of Nijinska's own classical ballets, *Scènes* is curiously inscrutable in its tone. Yet its references to the flowering of nineteenth-century Russian ballet, veined with courtliness and torrentially romantic love stories, lend it the shadow of depth. To my eyes, its style is emphatically artificial, with limbs changing position and heads rotating to correlate with the mathematics of Stravinsky's score, rather than to follow through physical impulses, as in an actual old classic.

And there are more puzzles. The costumes (by Ashton) are post-World War II glamour; the atmosphere, owing to André Beaurepaire's uncomfortably dark décor, is menacing. And yet the choreography, oddly stiff as it seems, bespeaks a language of sacred love. *Scènes de ballet* has remained in the Royal's repertory, a useful challenge in its technical terms alone; yet it is one of the rare Ashton works to have lasted which does not emotionally reveal itself on the sheer basis of its performances. Why was Ashton so delighted with it? What did he hope an ideal audience would see? (At its premiere, even the critics in his corner found the work cool, off-putting.)

A work such as Ashton's last act of *Swan Lake*, which is purely wonderful, does not require explanations. It is the puzzlement engendered by something such as *Scènes de ballet* that drives a dancegoer to the bookshelf, where the Ashton section now contains two indispensable volumes: Kavanagh's book, and *Frederick Ashton and His Ballets* by David Vaughan, which appeared twenty years ago. (A revised and expanded edition of it will be published by Dance

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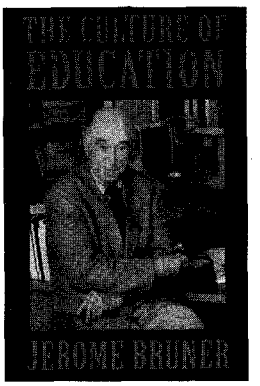

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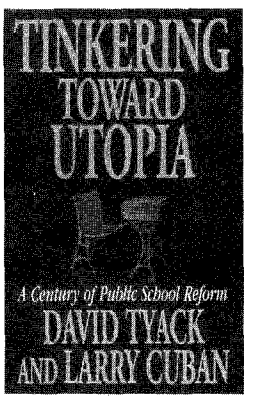

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Books in London next year.) Although both books cover the same career, more or less, and sometimes overlap in their sources—Kavanagh's biography would not have been possible without Vaughan's pathbreaking research, as she notes—the stories that they tell, the information that they impart, and the conclusions that they draw are so polemically unlike that to read merely one is less than to read neither.

Consider their treatments of the *Scènes de ballet* of 1948. Vaughan, a native of England who began to follow Ashton's work in the 1930s, saw the original production. "At first Fonteyn seemed ill at ease in the ballerina role," he writes, "a situation that was always betrayed by her adoption of a rather glassy, fixed smile, but as she grew in authority in the great classic roles she began to understand this one and to grasp that its essential quality was elegance rather than mere chic." Although Vaughan's discussion of the work's sources is far more extensive (including an account from Ashton of his interest in Euclid at the time that underwrote the spatial configuration of the dance patterns), his distinction between "elegance" and "chic" captures not only what Ashton intended about the effect of *Scènes* but also Vaughan's reason for devoting himself to a scrupulous choreographic biography in the first place.

Vaughan wrote his book for audiences in the United States, where the Royal's Ashton repertory was well-received on the whole yet was also called into question by some formidable voices for what was deemed a disfiguring streak of frivolity in Ashton's character. The comparison, always unfavorable for Ashton, was with Balanchine. Ashton once compared himself with Balanchine in print and peevishly arrived at the same conclusion. Unlike Balanchine, he did not read music; he did not study ballet as a child (a real disadvantage, since ballet technique is best absorbed while young), and his working process required the dancers to contribute to the generation of steps through improvisation, which Ashton would then reshape and edit. Balanchine, whose interest in the ballet vocabulary was a separate, ineluctable fascination from his interest in any particular performer, and even from his understanding of music, was, by all accounts, much more decisive than Ashton in matters of dance action. The result was that he made many more ballets (over 400 to Ashton's nearly 150), and many more of the ballets that he made were what the late Dale Harris called "dancer-proof," that is, longevity in repertory is not entirely dependent on the original casts.

Vaughan's book sets out to show, however, that if one studies the Ashton oeuvre carefully, the sensibility that produced the better part of it is of the highest aesthetic refinement; and that a vast cultural knowledge underlies even an Ashton bauble or showpiece. In his chapter on *Scènes*, Vaughan emphasizes that Ashton's obsession with Euclid served a larger—and, for ballet choreographers, a more profound—allegiance to Petipa; the quotes from the Petipa-Ivanov ballets were cues to the audience that this was Ashton's essay about the older master's methods of composition, his elements of structure, and his aesthetic priorities. Although Vaughan was evidently versed in secondhand gossip concerning Ashton's off-stage life, he did not follow that up in the book, nor did Ashton encourage him to. "He is, as one very quickly learns, a very private person, not given to intimate revelation," Vaughan wrote in his foreword. "For this reason, and because I believe that a desire for privacy should be respected, those who look for gossip or possibly scandalous speculation will not find it here."

A distinction is being made between the facts of Ashton's life and the fantasies of his ballets, and it gives a reader pause. Vaughan discusses a great deal of sensitive sexual imagery in the course of his analysis of the choreography—he is no prude—but he also operates intellectually from the premise that choreography, like other arts, is a complicated, synthesizing endeavor of symbolic logic whose origins in life do not need to be known in order for the work to communicate in the theater—indeed, whose origins in life may not ever be fully known, even by the choreographer. If one wishes to learn what matters in the psyche and personality of the creator in order to enrich one's comprehension and enjoyment of the art, one studies the processes and the products of creation. The rest is voyeurism.

Kavanagh's book has been written under new circumstances. She is a British ballet critic who met Ashton in 1984 and became his friend, conversing frequently with him and his acquaintances toward the prospect of a biography until his death in 1988. Although Ashton apparently opened up to her in a way he did not do to Vaughan, he was also, she says, "a recalcitrant subject," and early on he broke off their friendship for "almost a year," believing that she had betrayed him by publishing a confidence in an interview. With candor, she speaks of Ashton's declared ambivalence at handing over to her anecdotes that could, in a biography written reductively or meanly, compromise his public prestige as an artist.

After his death, she decided to continue with her project, and she was evidently trusted by many people who loved him, gaining access to his papers and eliciting detailed personal information in interviews, as well as some of Ashton's vulnerable letters. Indeed, it is to the families of Ashton and some of his muses that she extends her most grateful acknowledgments. Kavanagh spent a decade on this book, and consulted a host of authorities. Like Vaughan's book, *Secret Muses* represents an unimpeachable commitment to the subject. Kavanagh's dance information is never better then Vaughan's, and frequently it is less satisfactory in twice the space; but her portrait of Frederick Ashton, a human being who happened to choreograph, constitutes a standard against which other ballet biographies will be measured.

Kavanagh tenders a painstakingly argued justification for shining a posthumous lantern on matters that Ashton sought to hide. Ashton, she argues, was a genius of a specific kind. "For me," she explains, "the most important discovery of writing Ashton's biography has been the extent to which his life *generated* his work. His genius was subjective, he lived by his heart and imbued his work with the sense of yearning and suffering that he himself experienced. 'I pour into it all my love, my frustrations, and sometimes autobiographical details.... In many ways, it has more reality than the life which I live.'" The ballet, she proposes, was not only Ashton's principal wife; it was principally his life. This is not the case for every choreographer. Indeed, it is quite rare. Balanchine, tempered as a teenager in the crucible of the Russian Revolution, and chastened by a year in a sanitorium, recovering from the loss of a lung to tuberculosis, knew that even when he had to give up studying ballet to forage for food in sub-zero temperatures, he could survive. Ashton's consecration to ballet seems closer to a performer's identification with his or her own art. In this essential way, he reminds one of Pavlova, who danced until she died.

Ashton was not initially a choreographer by choice, despite his gifts for it. He wanted to be a dancer, and began to explore the making of dances only when it became clear that he had started his training too late to meet his own standards of performing excellence. From a few films of his dancing during the 1930s that have miraculously been saved, one can see that he had everything necessary

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to be a marvellous dancer: the coordination, the intuitive kinetic taste, the amazing talent for mimicry (equivalent to an actor's ear for accents), the humility, and, most of all, the appetite. Everything but those blunt yet fundamental elements of execution, such as full turnout of the legs, that early childhood training would have given him.

Ashton's wound as a child at his father's impenetrable opposition to ballet study seems never to have healed, even partially. He died with the idea that his father was a monster, and his fans have been led to adopt that idea as well. One of the great coups of Kavanagh's biography is her independent curiosity about the motivations of George Ashton, the pursuit of which led her to travel to South America. The research that brings her to discuss him as a complex individual, to humanize him as his son never could, is a gift to both men, as well as to the history of ballet. (Kavanagh speculates that George Ashton "was a romantic, a fantasist, who, without a creative outlet into which to channel his visions, had fictionalized his own life." She sums up his characteristically grim moods as a form of melancholia, and it was so severe it led him to take his own life.)

Kavanagh's discussion of *Scènes de ballet* shows up in the chapter entitled "Mr A Obsessed with Mr B," a chronicle of the years 1947-1950. The title, a Tiffany diamond of compression, refers to two relationships of Ashton's during that time. Most obviously, we are meant to think of Mr. A(shton)'s sense of inadequacy in comparison with Mr. B(alanchine). During these years, the choreographers were in relatively sustained contact. It was *Scènes de ballet* that led Balanchine to invite Ashton to choreograph for Ballet Society—an invitation that Ashton would later return when, in 1950, he helped to bring over Balanchine to set *Ballet Imperial* at Covent Garden. Balanchine hadn't even seen *Scènes*, which was given its premiere in London; he extended his offer based on secondhand accounts (one of them Lincoln Kirstein's, who wanted to import *Scènes* itself). Ashton's use of a score by Stravinsky may also have piqued Balanchine's interest. Ashton was proud of his staging of the score, remarking in a letter that "many people rave about it and say it's the best I've done, which I think, and Stravinsky's son adores it."

And also embedded in Kavanagh's chapter title is a reference to Ashton's love affair at the time with a much younger American dancer named Dick Beard. Kavanagh's biographical method puts pressure on this figure to serve as a secret muse of *Scènes*, although in a purely romantic rather than a specifically sexual sense. At the time *Scènes* was choreographed in London, Beard was in New York. The two corresponded, but an ocean separated them, and so the love that they protested was chivalric, despite its erotic expression in their letters. There may be an emotional allegory in the work; if so, it would be most complicated. According to Kavanagh, Ashton cast one or two other lovers as actual performers in it and embellished the geometry with static images of male love. These are not emphasized as such; they are sculptural postures, whose potential meanings cohere for those who care to seek them. The choreographic relationships, then, become a virtual cat's cradle of complexity, clarified only by the straightforward obeisance of all the male dancers to the ballerina Fonteyn.

On the other hand, since Kavanagh argues throughout *Secret Muses* that Ashton not only loved his ballerinas but also identified with them—that they *were* him, in effect—even this apparently simple paradigm of courtly devotion may be subject to reinterpretation. Does the ballet unnerve some audiences because of the quite Modernist sense it conveys that there is no final way to know it, no secret summation, no perfect vantage point from which all will coalesce into a revealing apothegm, as, in its very staging, the patterns are constructed so that anywhere can be the front? In that case, could it be that the road to appreciation of this unforthcoming yet fascinating Ashtonian experiment is the opportunity to see it periodically? After four decades in the repertory of the Royal Ballet, it has become a treasure for the balletgoers of London. Several generations have had the opportunity to learn how to look at it. They may not agree with the choreographer that it constitutes his best ballet of all, but they can accept it as an example of the highest stages of his craft.

So where does this leave Kavanagh's effort to get us to glimpse a connection between the cooling of Ashton's ardor toward Beard and the Arctic quality of the choreography—to whisper, in other words, that the tone of *Scènes* may in part be explained by biographical circumstances that have nothing directly to do with its creation? In the book's reflective afterword, she herself wonders, using a later Ashton ballet as a focus:

> Does the knowledge that the Young Girl in *The Two Pigeons* is a reincarnation of the male chemistry student with whom [Ashton] was infatuated really add a valuable

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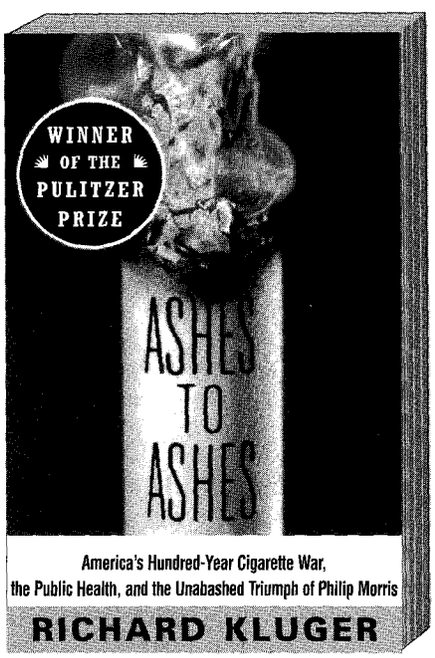
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new dimension to the ballet's achingly sweet reconciliation duet? If anything, it is a distraction, diminishing the work's power of suggestion, the raison d'être of dance. It was this—the fear that exposure of the prosaic reality of the lived life would destroy the delicate subterfuge and poetry of his art—that, I believe, fuelled Fred's resistance far more than any sense of propriety. "Choreography is my whole being, my whole life, my reason for living," he once told an American journalist.

Her anxiety is even more profoundly revealed in the way that she has chosen to conclude the story. The last paragraphs of her last chapter about the life of Ashton quote from Fonteyn's tribute, written for his memorial service. It is possible to take what she says as ceremonial; but if one considers her words seriously, they question the rationale for writing an Ashton biography any longer than this passage:

As a man I see a paradox: on the one hand sophistication and finely developed taste in all things, yet on the other a very simple person at heart. One might expect a highly sophisticated person to make an effort to conceal some emotions. Not Ashton; like a child, if he was hurt, angry or even jealous he made no pretence. He was, above all, a very *human* human being, and for that, as much as for his extraordinary talents, he was beloved by all.

Achievements of the compass of Ashton's and Balanchine's are too big, too richly stocked, and too active to pin down entirely. They don't reduce; they renew. They have created art that has made us chuckle, and weep, and ponder, and thrill to unlimited vistas of possibility; and the miracle is that in the evanescent medium in which the artists labored the art has lived on after they, themselves, have vanished. They have been largely responsible for putting theatrical dancing on the map as a nerve center of civilization. To take the measure of their full capacity, you must go to the theater.

Ballets, under the direction of people who know them thoroughly and care about them, can live. Some of Balanchine's dancers have proved this by their recent stagings and coaching of the Balanchine repertory around the country; and Anthony Dowell, one of Ashton's greatest classicists on stage and the director of the Royal Ballet today, has made a case for the possibility with the Ashton repertory. With the right casts, well-played music, and the right designers in place—as, in New York, for *La Valse* and for the Bussell-Cope performance of *Cinderella*—these works can catch the imagination of new audiences and new dancers. Even *Daphnis and Chloe*, the most perishable of the works that the Royal danced at the Met a few months ago, because it is the most dependent on the translucency of character in its principals, as well as on their finesse as technicians—even this work can touch the heart and revive the sensibility, as it did with one of the casts I saw (Bruce Sansom and Miyako Yoshida). Ashton's luck really does seem inexhaustible. His *Daphnis and Chloe* is still rejuvenating dancers despite forty-six years of critical objections to its length, its costumes, and its structure, as well as several decades of lamentation that without its original cast it would never fly again. Well, it flies.

Dowell has announced that he intends to restage Ashton's 1961 setting of Stravinsky's *Persephone*, because he believes that it would teach something to the Royal's current group of dancers. Even Ashton's most loyal fans are surprised—and curious. *Persephone* has come down to us as a kind of dividing line among Ashtonians, a ballet that, as Vaughan chronicles, critics deplored and artists adored. "A very noble ballet, Ashton in the fullness of his maturity," was de Valois's review, while Marie Rambert, who had witnessed nearly his entire body of work, thought it the best ballet he had made up to that time. Vaughan recounts that *Persephone* was performed twelve times during its first season, then three times the following year, and, when revived in 1967, eight more times. "Now, presumably, it is lost," his 1977 book reads. *Persephone*! We'll see. •

Black Noise

BY JAMES WOOD

Underworld by Don DeLillo

(Scribner, 827 pp., $27.50)

To call *Underworld* a failure might seem an act of slightly flirtatious irrelevance. It is to scratch destiny's toe. The book is so large, so serious, so ambitious, so often well-written, so punctually intelligent, that it produces its own antibodies and makes criticism a small germ. Moreover, Don DeLillo's huge endeavor represents a promise to restock the novel's wasting pedigree in our age. Few want to see the promise broken. It is easy, and rightly so, for big books to flush away criticism.

But DeLillo's novel, despite chapters of brilliance, does not gather its local victories as a book this large should. Instead, it enforces relations between its parts which it cannot coax. Curiously, it is at once distractingly centrifugal and dogmatically centripetal: its many characters dissolve an intensity that the novel insists on repeating and repeating. Its big, broken structure moves back and forward through all the decades since 1951, travelling from Arizona to the Bronx to Kazakhstan and back again, and the book intends to be a collection of lavish fragments, set down in a maze: for fifty pages we are with Nick Shay, the central character, in Phoenix in 1992; for another fifty pages, in the Bronx with a group of charitable nuns, in the 1980s; then we move back to 1974, where we spend time with Klara Sax, a conceptual artist, in New York; then back to Harlem, in 1951; for a hundred and twenty pages, we visit Nick's childhood in the Bronx of the 1950s—and so on. But the effect is of subtraction, not addition. With the exception of Nick Shay, we do not spend enough time with the many characters for their lives to seem more than a rattle of months on the page. Nick exists, grayly; but fictionally speaking, he is a stranger promoted above his station. Despite the amount of superb description that DeLillo spends on Nick's childhood Bronx, it would be hard to describe him once the novel has ended. The novel mistakes him for an interesting enigma. Thus it is that one can read, unmoved at the deepest levels, more than 800 pages.

But even as it booms outwards, *Underworld* sucks inwards. In every scene, DeLillo uses his characters to force home his themes, or to do so by exaggerating his themes into comedy. DeLillo has often seemed to me a didactic writer who wants to be honored for not being one. *Mao II*, his last novel, was a geometric sermon. In *Underworld*, everything always comes back to a few ports: nuclear war, the secret power of the American government, the paranoid state in which

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the bomb put us all, the ambushing power of the postmodern image-culture. The book is neurotically webbed—not surprising, perhaps, for a novel that seems to believe that "everything is connected."

Underworld proves, once and for all, or so I must hope, the incompatibility of paranoid history with great fiction. (That private paranoias can generate great fiction is obvious from Dostoevsky and Svevo.) Why is political paranoia so bad for the novel? In part because it is a mysticism facing a form that exists to repel it. Paranoia has an unlicensed freedom that outraces fiction, whose formal task is to establish a licensed freedom. At a simple level, this can be seen in DeLillo's language. It is often richly exact; but when DeLillo writes about secrets, about hidden plots and political viruses, his language becomes a thick scrabble. It sickens unto vagueness.

The culture of secrets encourages a pomposity in DeLillo and his characters. In *White Noise*, he smartly burlesqued a portentousness that he seems now to respect. But the paranoid character is always at the center of all his plots; he worships himself really, he is the brass god of his own mysticism. This can make characters seem a little ridiculous, which DeLillo knows: his novel is full of madly paranoid people, some of whom are mocked. Too often, however, DeLillo appears to offer a solemn endorsement; and his spiralling lyricism represents that endorsement.

In one scene, Brian Glassic, a colleague of Nick Shay's who works with him at a firm called Waste Containment, stands before a huge garbage landfill on Staten Island:

> To understand all this. To penetrate this secret. The mountain was here, unconcealed, but no one saw it or thought about it, no one knew it existed except the engineers . . . a unique cultural deposit . . . and he saw himself for the first time as a member of an esoteric order, they were adepts and seers, crafting the future, the city planners, the waste managers, the compost technicians, the landscapers who would build hanging gardens here, make a park one day out of every kind of used and eroded object of desire.

Brian stands before garbage the way Ruskin stood before Rouen Cathedral. He is having an epiphany, and DeLillo does not seem to think it silly or hubristic of him. Yet it is only by seeing garbage as a "secret" in the first place that he is led into these moist decodings. And into glamorous untruth. One notices that Brian/DeLillo assumes that garbage only comprises "object[s] of desire"; whereas garbage contains objects of indifference, convenience, and hatred. In this way, paranoia leads the novel astray.

In a like manner, Sister Edgar, a nun who runs a charity in the Bronx, is a bit eccentric, but hardly insane. She puts on latex gloves before doing her rounds among the AIDS patients. The world seems to her a brew of hidden viruses and acronyms: "Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. Komitet Gosudartsvennoi Bezopasnosti. Yes, the KGB was part of the multiplying swarm, the cell-blast of reality that has to be distilled and initialed in order to be seen." Her gloves are protection against "the viral entities hidden within, submicroscopic parasites in their soviet socialist protein coats." Now, it would seem that DeLillo is presenting us with a crank. But it is precisely DeLillo's little surge of lyricism—"in their soviet socialist protein coats"—that gives one pause. This is not how a nun would express herself, even a cranky nun. It is how DeLillo expresses himself. Which is not to say that DeLillo believes that the Bronx is, or ever was, crawling with KGB agents; only that DeLillo's verbal investment in this idea exceeds its worth, and thus appears to credit it. Paranoia makes language go for broke, in both senses of the phrase.

The problem can be reformulated. If, when DeLillo writes about "parasites in their soviet socialist protein coats," he neither believes that his character would think like this, nor thinks like this himself, nor is expressing an actual truth, then DeLillo is squandering language on a game. This is expensive frivolity. And as it happens, Sister Edgar *is* a kind of game. Though she appears often in *Underworld*, she is not supposed to be real. She is supposed to be a female counterpart to J.Edgar Hoover: Hoover in drag. It is Hoover, whom DeLillo introduces early in the novel as a man obsessed with viruses and bacteria and the KGB, who is speaking through Sister Edgar. And it is Hoover's paranoid vision that DeLillo's lyricism flatters.

Political paranoia, then, makes characters unreal, because the unreality of their interests colors them and claims them, like the chameleon that explodes when it is placed on Scottish tartan. A character's private paranoia, such as Svevo's Zeno, has a named source in the actions of other individuals, and therefore a reality, even if it is unfounded. But political paranoia's unreality is its necessary sourcelessness. Not all DeLillo's paranoid characters are as unreal as Sister Edgar; and some are derided. What

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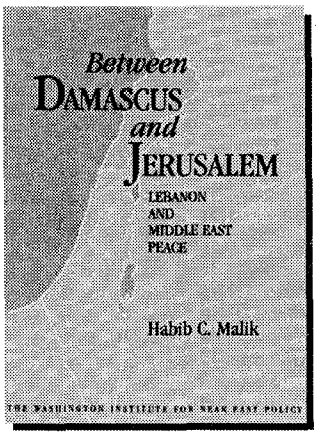

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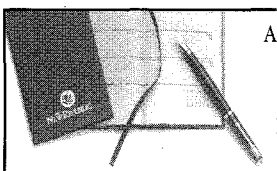

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is striking is how many paranoid people there are in this novel, and how this multitude drives so many perforations of unreality into the book's form that its truths come to seem ragged and uncertain, while its untruths have an airy consistency.

It is worth trying to list the examples of paranoia, so as to give a sense of how repetitive is the novel. We meet J. Edgar Hoover at the start of *Underworld.* He is part of a huge crowd attending the famous Giants-Dodgers game in 1951. The front page of *The New York Times* celebrated Bobby Thomson's home run as "The Shot Heard 'Round The World." And on the same page, it was reported that the Russians had detonated their first nuclear bomb, in Kazakhstan. DeLillo has said that these two shots provided him with the fuse of his novel.

Hoover is informed, mid-game, of the Russian success. DeLillo comments: "There is the secret of the bomb and there are the secrets that the bomb inspires, things even the Director cannot guess ... because these plots are only now evolving. This is what he knows, that the genius of the bomb is printed not only in its physics of particles and rays but in the occasion it creates for new secrets. For every atmospheric blast ... for every one of these he reckons a hundred plots go underground, to spawn and skein." This is the novel's task: to tell the secret history, the plots of a generation forced underground by the bomb.

DON DELILLO BY VINT LAWRENCE FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

The bomb was administered by paranoiacs and it turned Americans into paranoiacs. DeLillo follows the lives of a group of people affected by nuclear power and connected directly and indirectly with that ballgame: there is Nick Shay, a teenager in 1951, who now works for a firm that gets rid of nuclear and other waste; his brother Matt Shay, a mathematician who does the physics for nuclear weapons in New Mexico: "There were people here who didn't know where their work ended up... Everything connected at some undisclosed point down the system line." Matt has a bad trip in which he remembers his service in Vietnam, and recalls that the cans of agent orange resembled cans of frozen Minute Maid. Matt "felt he'd glimpsed some horrific system of connections in which you can't tell the difference between one thing and another, between a soup can and a car bomb, because they are made by the same people in the same way and ultimately refer to the same thing.... And how can you tell the difference between orange juice and agent orange if the same massive system connects them at levels outside your comprehension.... Because everything connects in the end."

There is Nick's black colleague, Big Sims, who believes that the census is a fraud because it hides the real numbers of black people in the country. He tells Nick about a boat that has been at sea for two years, trying to find a country poor enough to accept its load of possibly contaminated waste. There is Detwiler, who used to be a "garbage guerrilla" and thinks that the boat contains a shipment of CIA heroin. Detwiler, too, believes that "everything is connected." There is the artist Klara Sax, who is building an enormous installation in the Southwest desert, by painting hundreds of B-52 bombers which are now retired but which used to carry nuclear bombs. She fears the bomb as something that "outimagine[s] the mind." There is a preacher glimpsed on a street corner in Harlem in 1951 ranting, Farrakhan-style, about the masonic insignia on the dollar bills. There is Marvin Lundy, a baseball fanatic who has paranoid fantasies, and who thinks that there were 20,000 empty seats at the ballgame in 1951 because "certain events have a quality of unconscious fear. I believe in my heart that people sensed some catastrophe in the air." There is a showing, in 1974, of the Zapruder film of Kennedy's assassination. There is Sister Edgar.

After a while, DeLillo's attitude toward these people, some of whom are supposed to be crazed, comes to seem irrelevant; their bulk amounts to a pedagogical statement. Though they are all different, their differences are burned away by the scandal of their sameness. DeLillo's anxiety about having anyone of substance in the novel unconnected to his central theme is not only irritatingly airless, it is itself a little paranoid, as if the writer can only employ characters who are loyal to him and his agenda. I am not saying that if one writes about paranoid people one becomes paranoid; only that a novel speaks its themes not just in what it says explicitly, but also in what it accumulates gently. The novel comes to seem complicit with the paranoia it describes.

The *form* of *Underworld* is paranoid. This gives the novel an explicitness that does it no favors. One effect is to make the reader feel more secure, and curiously immune—as if you were out on a crowded street and everybody except you were a murderer. Also, this explicitness somewhat obstructs the historical novelist's duty to show people moving through history. When all your characters are five-cent experts on that history—when they act more like historians than like ordinary people—history comes to seem factitious rather than lived.

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Nick Shay is intended to be the character who counters these shabby emergencies of fantasy. He is not a paranoiac, and will not surrender. Nick tells us that he does not believe Klara Sax's view of history as "a matter of missing minutes on the tape. I did not stand helpless before it.... A single narrative sweep, not ten thousand wisps of disinformation.... I believed we could know what was happening to us. We were not excluded from our own lives." But Nick is not a full or interesting enough character to carry weight. And besides, the form of the novel is against him. The novel does indeed read like "ten thousand wisps of disinformation."

Such an agglomeration of paranoid people makes the reader weary about discrimination, and thus deprives this novel of one of fiction's great goads. Paranoia must necessarily do this to fiction, for it silences judgment. One might call this the logic of pampered ignorance. If what you start out from is what you do not know, this is an infinitely extendable mystical spectrum. One can always not know more. Paranoia approaches knowledge from behind, so that anything can be connected with anything. It is a dogmatic occultism. Yet fiction's task is show where connections seem to end, the better for their vivid spread. Henry James saw this in his preface to *Roderick Hudson*: "Really, universally, relations stop nowhere, and the exquisite problem of the artist is eternally but to draw, by a geometry of his own, the circle within which they shall happily *appear* to do so." It may be that this novel's immense size has to do with the paranoid vision's inability to stop collecting connections.

Fiction is the avenger of paranoias. The very form of fiction comports tensely, or not at all, with political paranoia, and paranoia will always tend toward an explicitness of form. It is an odd paradox of paranoia that all its attention is toward what is hidden, but it exists only when it is given coarse voice. There is no such thing as a quiet paranoid; the neurosis is essentially voluble. Yet fiction exists the other way round. Fiction's attention is toward what is tangible; yet it exists most effectively when its themes are unspoken. An ideal fiction has a kind of thematic mysticism, whereby the novel gives up its meanings as it passes, as it disappears; the way snow gets dirtier, more marked, as it disappears. Fiction's meaning is all that cannot be said. Paranoia's meaning is all that can be said, because it only exists in the saying. It therefore has to be spoken explicitly, by the characters or the author or both. The delicacy of fiction is

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In the context of the negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians that have now been going on for almost four years, it is often asserted that the Israeli towns and villages (usually and with some derogation referred to as "settlements") in Judea/Samaria (the "West Bank") are possibly the most serious obstacle to peace. That has been and is being repeated so often that many have come to accept it as truth.

What are the facts?

A recap of history. Some thumbnail history may be in order. Large numbers of Jews have been living in these territories since biblical times. Most of the Arabs living there are in fact relative newcomers. "Palestine" is the entire area now covered by Israel including Judea/Samaria (the so-called "West Bank") and what is now the Kingdom of Jordan. It originally also included the Golan Heights, which later, in an agreement between England and France, were ceded to France, and to Syria as the successor in possession. In 1922, contrary to the Mandate of the League of Nations, the British severed the entire area east of the Jordan and gave it to the Hashemite Arabs for their assistance in World War I. Thus, fully 75% of Palestine, all of which under the Mandate and under the terms of the Balfour Declaration was meant to be a home for the Jewish people, was lost for that purpose. Only the area west of the Jordan River was left for the Jewish homeland.

"Why should the Arab countries and the 'West Bank' be the only places in the world where Jews are not allowed to live?"

How the West Bank became "Arab country." In 1947, after decades of strife between Arabs and Jews, the British decided to relinquish the Mandate. The UN stepped in and proposed a partition plan under which the country (west of the River) was to be divided into respective Arab and Jewish areas. Jerusalem was to be internationalized. The Jews accepted the plan; the Arabs refused it out of hand. In 1948, on the twice truncated territory allotted to them by the U.N., the Jews declared their independence and the state of Israel was born. On the same day, six Arab armies invaded the new-born state. In what can be described as an almost biblical miracle, the Jews defeated them. When an armistice was finally secured, however, TransJordan remained in possession of Judea/Samaria (the "West Bank") and the eastern part of Jerusalem; Egypt remained in possession of the Gaza Strip. TransJordan renamed itself Jordan.

The Six-Day War. Once in possession of the "West Bank" and eastern Jerusalem, the Jordanians promptly proceeded to expel all Jews and systematically to desecrate and to destroy most Jewish sacred places, cemeteries and houses of worship. No Jews, regardless of citizenship were allowed into the "West Bank," eastern Jerusalem, the locale of the Western Wall, the holiest site in Judaism. In 1967, Egyptian president Abdel Nasser, joined by the same array of Arab armies that had unsuccessfully tried to destroy Israel at its birth in 1948, launched another war against Israel "to drive the Jews into the sea" and into oblivion, once and for all. But the Israelis utterly defeated the combined Arab might in the Six-Day War, one of the greatest military victories in history. When the dust of war settled, the Israelis had not only retained their national territory, but had *repossessed* the territories of Judea/Sumaria (the "West Bank"), the eastern part of Jerusalem, the Gaza Strip, the Golan Heights and had totally occupied Egypt's vast Sinai Peninsula.

It is clear from this short history that Israel's claim to the "West Bank" is far stronger than that of the Arabs. It's only by constant repitition that the world has come to think of these territories as "occupied Arab land." About 200,000 Jews now live in these territories. And why shouldn't they? Why should the Arab countries and the "West Bank" be the only places in the whole world where Jews cannot live? How can 200,000 Jews living among one million Arabs be "an obstacle to peace?" Over one million Arabs live in Israel. They are citizens, they have every civil right, and of course have nothing to fear from their Jewish fellow citizens. Certainly, nobody considers them an obstacle to peace.

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much stronger than the fattened feebleness of paranoia. Paranoia will always try to get fiction to speak about paranoia, as in *Underworld.*

Don DeLillo is a serious artist whose pointed stewardship of the novel in our culture, and pleasure in the chafe of fictional language, is cherishable. But his very defensiveness about the novel leads him, as far as one can see, into a philosophy of history that may weaken the novel, and into a battle with the culture that the novel can only lose. Again, the problem is that DeLillo veers toward a complicity with the very culture he wants to defend the novel against. Yet DeLillo's struggle with the anaconda of postmodern America, if not his personal theory of that struggle, is representative of much American writing since 1960, when Philip Roth famously argued that American reality was more vivid, and hence more fictional, than American fiction. DeLillo is not isolate; where *Underworld* fails, it fails collegiately.

For some time DeLillo has been interestingly obsessed with the image in our culture: its sucking power and the tantric theft of aura by television and culture. *White Noise* was a funny and acute razing of a generation of academics who had been robbed of their epistemological innocence. They say things like, "We were kids. It was too early in the cultural matrix for actual screwing," and they test each other on where they were when James Dean or Elvis died. DeLillo's own prose is nervously alert to this image-corruption, and squeezes it for ironic effect—as when he describes one of these academics as having "the innocent prewar look of a rural murderer"; or, more superbly, in *Mao II,* when he writes of drivers sitting in cars caught in a Manhattan jam, "slumped in the gloom like inmates watching daytime TV." At such moments, DeLillo properly steals new fictional life back from a culture that is depleting fiction.

DeLillo seems to argue in his recent work that the peculiarity of our time is that the culture has become a kind of debased novelist, has overtaken the novelist. *Mao II* suggested—unconvincingly, I think—that the novelist used to "alter the inner life of the culture," but that this soul-stealing power no longer belongs to novelists. Instead, it belongs to terrorists ("they make raids on human consciousness"), to the new power of crowds ("the future belongs to crowds"), to the nightly TV news ("News of disaster is the only narrative people need. The darker the news, the grander the narrative"), to paranoiacs of all stripes, and to revolutionaries and cult-leaders such as Mao and the Reverend Moon. All these forces act on the unconscious in the way fiction used to act on it, because they share with fiction a certain fictiveness. They invent realities, shape them, as the novel used to, and rub them into the collective unconscious.

In *Underworld,* DeLillo is more specific. The image-culture is still powerful in this book, but now the charge is against the state. This time the state is a novelist. For when the Americans discovered the bomb, they infiltrated our dreams. Klara Sax, the performance-artist, explains: "I think that if you maintain a force in the world that comes into people's sleep, you are exercising a meaningful power.... The poets wrote long poems with dirty words and that's about as close as we came, actually, to a thoughtful response. Because they had brought something into the world that outimagined the mind." Later in the book, a group of druggies watch the Zapruder footage of Kennedy's assassination with "an acquired sort of awe ... it was amazing that there were forces in the culture that could outimagine them."

The paranoia of the state is greater than the paranoia of the individual; and both act like novelists. (The crucial word is "outimagine"; paranoia is imaginative work.) DeLillo made this explicit in a recent essay in *The New York Times,* called "The Power of History." He argued that great historical figures have a kind of fictionality because they leave the historical record to bristle in myth and memory. And yet, DeLillo argued, Hoover was a real man. Surely a historical novelist who wants Hoover in his book (and Frank Sinatra, Jackie Gleason, and Lenny Bruce, who all appear) runs the risk of "distort[ing] the lives of real people?" Well, DeLillo answers, "not as much as the memoirist does, intentionally, or the biographer, unintentionally. That's the easy answer. The deeper reply begins with a man who distorted the lives of real people as a matter of bureaucratic routine." DeLillo is a little opaque here, but he appears to be suggesting that since Hoover "distorted the lives of real people" (that is, kept almost-fictional files on people), the novel can fight back with its own distortions, and keep a kind of file on the age.

In other words: since Hoover acted like a bad novelist, it is time to act like a good novelist, and defeat the likes of Hoover on his own turf. DeLillo may not intend an equivalence between the fiction-making powers of history and the fiction-making powers of fiction, but he has produced one. The danger is obvious. For Hoover may have acted like a writer, but he was not a writer. DeLillo both acts like and is a writer. The distinction, rather than the equivalence, between Hoover and DeLillo, or between the state and the novel, seems worth keeping. To say that Hoover acted *like* a novelist is a respectable metaphorical exaggeration. To say that the novelist should act like Hoover is to suggest, in effect, that Hoover *was* a novelist. To suggest that Hoover was a novelist is to believe in your own metaphor to the point of turning history into metaphor. It is to say that history does not just make fiction, it is fiction. And to suggest that the novelist acts like Hoover is to surrender the novel to Hoover's terms even as the novelist prepares to fight Hoover. It is to be more paranoid than Hoover himself.

DeLillo feels he needs this equivalence so as to do better battle; he is taking on protective camouflage. But his vision does come close to turning history into fiction. Bill Gray, in *Mao II,* says this: "There's a curious knot that binds novelists and terrorists.... Years ago I used to think it was possible for a novelist to alter the inner life of the culture. Now bomb-makers and gunmen have taken that territory. They make raids on human consciousness. What writers used to do before we were all incorporated." Gray is something of a paranoid, of course. Still, DeLillo seems to agree with him. Yet it is only possible to think that novelists and terrorists do the same thing if you so expand your idea of "the inner life of the culture" that all the outer life of the culture has disappeared. It is in the outer life—real, unimagined life—that people lose their limbs to bombs; it is in the inner life that people grant their souls to Dostoevsky.

When DeLillo threatens to make history fictional, and the culture a novelist, he awards the culture a power that it does not have. He flatters the state. (George F. Will's complaint that DeLillo is a leftishly "bad citizen" is not only wrong because a writer should not have to be a good citizen; but because paranoia anxiously preserves the status quo.) DeLillo may not mean to do this. It is born, one suspects, of an anxiety about the destiny of the novel in our time. DeLillo wants the novel to win. If history acts like fiction, then perhaps the historical novel can defeat history; the truer fiction can win. This is a paranoid vision in which history is a plot to bring down the writer. Again, this is made explicit in "The Power of History." The novel, DeLillo observes there, "has lately grown desperate for attention." The culture, and the image, would seem to be

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stronger than fiction. But fiction can fight the culture: "At its root level, fiction is a kind of religious fanaticism with elements of obsession, superstition and awe. Such qualities will sooner or later state their adversarial relationship to history." A little later he goes further: fictional language "is stronger than the weight-bearing reality of actual people and events. It has a necessary existence, while the source material is exposed as merely contingent." Fiction is "stronger" than reality.

This is Bronx-fed Valéry. It is fin-de-siècle decadence, brawny aestheticism. And it is a dangerous aestheticism if it leads to the idea that fiction is stronger than reality only because reality is a weaker fiction. For if the novelist believes that reality is weak fiction, then he may stop putting much reality into his novels. If the novelist, however unwittingly, has conceded a battle that he cannot win to the greater fictional power of history, his fiction may become too fictional. And there are signs in DeLillo's recent work that this is the case. *Mao II* was a desperately unreal book, a kind of collection of conceptual episodes. It had a portentousness that made it vulnerable to comedy. That novel was dominated by the very images that it sought to overpower: one retains no character from that book, but what remains vivid are the photographs that DeLillo spread into his text—of mass Moonie weddings, of the crowd-destruction at the Hillsborough football stadium, of the millions at Ayatollah Khomeini's funeral. The fictionality of the image defeated the reality of the fiction.

The vast crowd of paranoiacs in *Underworld* certainly robs the fiction, and the reader, of crucial meters of discrimination. The book acts like realism, but it feels like hallucination. A great deal of human life passes through its corridors, but this life seems overshadowed by what is going on in the classrooms of paranoia—lessons in civic surliness. One notices how often DeLillo is drawn to create inhuman, or exaggeratedly human, setpieces: the 1951 baseball game; the 200 B-52 bombers in the desert; the landfill on Staten Island; graffiti in Manhattan; a cancer clinic in Kazakhstan where the ruined victims of radioactivity roam and loll. He seems to enjoy describing these large occurrences because in doing so he is, in some way, describing his own art. Sometimes *Underworld* seems a scrapbook of billboards, full of stiff importances. Only in one great, long passage, the hundred and twenty pages that beautifully draw DeLillo's childhood Bronx, does he relax his clench, and write about nothing so important as consciousness. Here he

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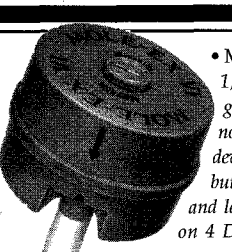

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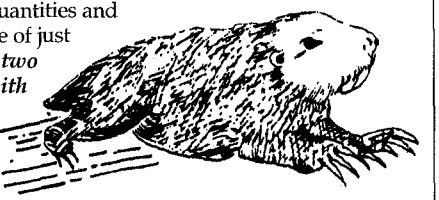

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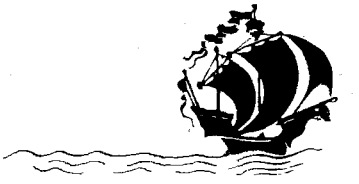

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writes fiction as it should be: a free scatter through time, unpressed, incontinent, unhostaged; surprised by the shock of its unhindered passage through frontiers that it, and not history, has invented.

In the nineteenth century, Stendhal, in *The Charterhouse of Parma*, and more acutely Tolstoy, saw the novel as the form that would examine the religion of history and show it to be a superstition. *War and Peace* sought to overturn Hegel's idea that Napoleon was the world-spirit on horseback. Fiction would shake history's certainties. It would show that to be in the army at Waterloo or Austerlitz was to be part of an entanglement that you could not understand. The religion of history would be fought with the secularism of fiction. Real lives in Moscow and St. Petersburg would lay bare the myth of the faceless swarming millions. The family would illuminate the army. (Despite his religious dogmatism, Tolstoy always treated the novel as a thoroughly secular form, he was always finger-deep in the bowl of reality.)

In his way, DeLillo is the inheritor of this struggle. But he cannot win it within the mystical and impoverishing confines of the paranoid vision. Paranoia concedes that there are forces that we create that act beyond our control. This was exactly Tolstoy's view of historical forces. But when Tolstoy decided that this was his view of history, as he did in *War and Peace*, there was no difficulty about showing, as a novelist, characters living within this world—for this is how we all live ordinarily, and always have done. Naturally enough, DeLillo has his own American anxiety; you cannot have Tolstoy's calm growl in late twentieth century America. But the paranoid vision incorporates a certain febrile despair that makes the creation of rounded individual characters impossible.

Paranoia acts as a falsely religious stimulant, to writers and to their characters. Thus DeLillo fights history with the religion of the novel, and speaks of the novel as a "fanaticism, with elements of obsession, superstition and awe"—an extraordinary inversion of the sober nineteenth-century legacy. Living in America, inheriting a dread that American reality is too powerful for American fiction, he responds by crawling very close to an outright denial of reality's groundedness, while exaggerating the strength of fiction's resistance. If Tolstoy fought superstition with the daylight of realism, DeLillo merely fights superstition with a new superstition. He fights the religion of history with the religion of fiction. This is the American aisle; and one needs a writer of just DeLillo's large talents to get us out of it, if he can. •

The Contagion of Liberty

BY CARYL PHILLIPS

Black Jacks: African American Seamen in the Age of Sail by W. Jeffrey Bolster

(Harvard University Press, 310 pp., $27)

In the years immediately preceding the Civil War, the greater part of the American merchant marine was registered in the Northern states. The maritime blockade established by Abraham Lincoln's administration sealed the ports of the southern states, which effectively caused a severe decline in coastal trade. The Confederacy was quick to send out raiding parties to attack any of the Union's merchant ships that dared to venture south, and during the course of the war more than 250 Union vessels were captured or destroyed. This devastation undermined confidence in the shipping industry, and by the end of the Civil War the merchant marine was in a lamentable condition.

For African Americans, the decline of American-owned and American-operated shipping marked the end of a remarkable period in their history, in which the vast shipping lanes of the Atlantic and the eastern seaboard not only provided them with a means of employment but offered them a chance to escape the harsh realities of slavery. Life at sea had also given African-Americans the opportunity to educate themselves, for the maritime world was truly multiracial and often multilingual, and black sailors were able to frequent foreign ports and exchange information and ideas far removed from the crushing restrictions of the United States.

Crispus Attucks, Denmark Vesey, Robert Smalls, Paul Cuffe, and many more African American leaders of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were schooled on board ships, and their maritime "education" bred within them a deep resistance to an on-shore system that denied them the most fundamental rights. Although the vast majority of African Americans served as ordinary seamen, many rose through the ranks and became officers, and some even achieved the supreme position of captain. And these positions were earned by dint of ability and experience.

W. Jeffrey Bolster's study of these men and their world begins in 1740 and concludes in 1865, with the end of the Civil War. Bolster is a cautious scholar, and he concludes the first paragraph of his preface with the disclaimer that "it may be germane that I am not black; again, possibly germane that I am a seaman of sailing ships." The former fact would appear to be of little significance, but Bolster's experience of sailing ships has clearly affected his narrative. And not always for the better: he sometimes assumes that his readers are also seamen and can find their way through the technical jargon of the sea unaided by footnotes or a glossary. What are we landlubbers expected to make of a sentence such as "Refinements in rigging were modest, such as the substitution of a gaff-rigged spanker for a lateen mizzen"? Still, the extraordinary story that Bolster tells makes such complaints moot.

With the onset of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, many Africans soon had their first experience of life beyond the horizon of sea and sky. Olaudah Equiano, whose *Autobiography* (1789) is the most important slave narrative of the eighteenth century, remembers that the crew on his slave ship was careful to make sure "that we could not see how they managed the vessel." This meant that the relationship between the cloth and the masts remained, at least for the time being, a mystery to Equiano and his fellow African captives. Yet a great number of captains did release slaves from their chains and put them to work during the voyage. Malaria, dysentery, and yellow fever often carried off crew members during the coastal loading process, and this careful utilization of "cargo" was a common practice. As a result, some captives arrived in the Americas with their own traditional maritime skills further enhanced by experience in the white man's ways of sailing.

In the years immediately preceding the Revolutionary War, the only way in which a slave could realistically escape the plantation system was by going to sea. This was often executed with the approval of the slave's owner, to whom the slave might remit an agreed amount

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each month. In 1747, Briton Hammon, a Massachusetts slave, came to an agreement with his owner that he might go to sea in exchange for remitting most of his pay to his owner. Hammon's *Narrative of the Uncommon Sufferings, and Surprising Deliverance of Briton Hammon, a Negro Man* (1760) contains the first account of a sea voyage published by an African American.

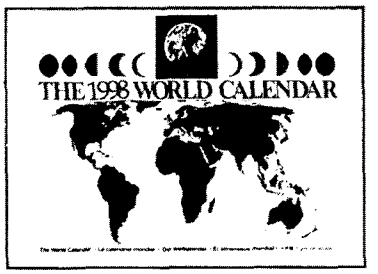
Most black sailors in this pre-Revolutionary period hired themselves out to whomever would pay. It was a precarious business, in which they risked being captured by pirates, sold back into slavery in the South, imprisoned, or worse. Many planters and slave-owners resented blacks being allowed to go to sea: they claimed that it bred an unacceptable independence in them. But blacks at sea became an increasingly common sight during the eighteenth century. For a white man to go to sea suggested a certain marginalization within his own society. Black seamen, by contrast, were the aristocrats of African American society. Seamen wrote the first six autobiographies by blacks published in English before 1800, and nearly all those works are characterized by the writer's ability to place his own life vividly in the context of more than one world. The autobiographies of Olaudah Equiano and Ukawsaw Gronniosaw in particular make connections between the worlds of Africa, Europe, and the Americas—and with a diasporan ease that we do not see again until the writings of Claude McKay, C.L.R. James, and Richard Wright in our own time.

Bolster is keen to stress the broader Atlantic significance of the African American world of sail, but his enthusiasm often finds him tearing down the wrong path and arriving at implausible conclusions. Thus he cites the case of Joseph Johnson, an early-nineteenth-century merchant sailor who, with a model of a ship balanced neatly on his head, begged in the streets of London. He claims that Johnson's existence and practice is evidence not only of the exchange of human traffic across the Atlantic in the time of slavery, but signifies something larger:

> In a classic case of cultural cross-over, Johnson appropriated a European artifact, one that had become meaningful to him through his own years of sea service, and reinvested it with African meanings to create a characteristically black cultural expression. Most white contemporaries looked at Joe Johnson through the distorting glass of race and saw an old black sailor cleverly manipulating a full-rigged ship on his head. London blacks, on the other hand, saw an aged mummer bobbing through the streets, connecting them with his coded ship to West Indian and Carolinian slaves, and to people on the Gold Coast and the Niger Delta. Forced to represent himself with fawning propriety to white almsgivers, Johnson undoubtedly took psychological refuge in their inability to comprehend him fully, even as he shook his creolized African past in their faces.

It is entirely possible, of course, that Johnson appeared to most London blacks as nothing more than "an old black sailor cleverly manipulating a full-rigged ship on his head." London blacks of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries constituted a very sophisticated and diverse section of society. Still, it is highly unlikely that they would have interpreted the paraphernalia on this beggar's head as a "coded ship" connecting them to "West Indian and Carolinian slaves," any more than Johnson would have felt that he was shaking his "creolized African past" in anyone's face. The man was begging: he knew it, the population of London knew it.

Bolster's book too often attempts to draw meaning from a dry academic well, and shake its doctoral credentials in our face. He is determined to extend his study beyond the domestic confines of the nascent United States and into the more amorphous zone of "the black



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Atlantic." At almost every juncture where he attempts an "Atlantic" reading, however, his examples are unconvincing, and his claims for them often unacceptably speculative. Still, there is a towering exception to this rule, and it is his wonderfully vivid examination of the events at Dartmoor prison in southern England during the War of 1812.

By 1814, nearly one thousand African American seamen, and five thousand of their white shipmates, found themselves imprisoned in the notoriously bleak and harsh conditions of Dartmoor prison. The first African Americans had arrived in April 1813, but as the war gathered momentum, and captured Americans of all colors refused to be pressed into the service of the Royal Navy, Dartmoor quickly filled up. Eventually whites petitioned to be separated from the "thieving" blacks, who in turn began to organize themselves and to establish their own codes of discipline and government. A charismatic native of Massachusetts, Richard Crafus, was elected "King," and he set about organizing his men in an autocratic manner. He made daily rounds, checking each berth for mess, punishing those who were dirty and drunken, and organizing recreation and gambling.

The imprisoned African Americans had their own theater group, which performed Shakespeare among its many productions, and they organized dances and church services to which whites were welcome. They offered instruction in boxing, dancing, and music; but, as Bolster points out, although "black and white sailors gambled, prayed, talked, and formed mobs together, racial expectations in Dartmoor exercised more influence than did shared experiences." As was true of life on board ship, shifting allegiances between groups of white sailors and black sailors sometimes cemented temporary alliances, but the reality of racial prejudice was always lurking just beneath the surface.

The American Revolution significantly changed the nature of black maritime activity. Before the American Revolution, practically every person of color in the Americas was a slave; but by the war's end almost 60,000 African Americans were free. Many of these men were sailors who during the war had served aboard privateers or in the Continental navy. Massachusetts and Connecticut in particular enlisted all the black sailors they could find, and at the conclusion of the war the abolition of slavery in the Northern states allowed black men freely to enter the labor market.

Those seamen who remained enslaved could look to the free Northern ports as places of refuge; and after the Haitian Revolution any black sailor arriving in Haiti was able to manipulate the political situation to his own advantage and to claim his freedom. But Haiti was merely a third of a Caribbean island, in which the Catholics spoke French and had cultural and spiritual practices that were entirely foreign to sailors from New York or Chesapeake Bay. The assumption of Haitian citizenship was, for most sailors, simply a way of circumventing the authority of the United States. According to Bolster, most African American sailors had no desire to give up their citizenship in the United States, but neither did they wish to risk being sold to Southern plantations.

The African American sailor who existed in the precarious twilight zone of transience and freedom became a model for those of his own race whom he left behind in the harsh world of the plantation. Frederick Douglass, who himself escaped to freedom dressed in the garb of a sailor, remembered the general re-

Epiphanies against the dark

Snow-white delicate thin young birch trunks emerge crystal clear from the blackish mauve forest haze

Tinkling snow water down through the raw black steep rock cleft, gateway to darkness

Epiphanies against the dark—sounds, song, words, metal lodes out of the mass of rock

The birch rises shining toiling toward the sun, that wanders across the dark landscape of cold, the deep dark basis of cold,
gleaming patches of cold, black bowels of cold. The body of the birch, white, striving

springtime the mauve branches, the swift-running ice-clear brown meltwater's taste, wet yellow-gray grass beneath brushwood, blackthorn, bark wet against the mouth

The crane's cry, the crane's body stretching wild and gray from the marsh, a single string twined hard, longing's hard cord

The trees weep, the earth weeps, soon it will be time for the resurrection of the stones

Like the scent of sap, of sun, the gray butterflies wake to a soft creeping silky mass across the black oozing tree-trunk, emptied chrysalids, eggshells of birds, roots now live their metaphoric existence—the eyes of the dead look up through the damp, dark poor soil as through a vault, above which is the movement of the zodiac, the song of the starry world

Birgitta Trotzig
—translated from the Swedish by Rika Lesser

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spect for sailors on the Maryland plantation of his youth in the 1830s. "My cousin Tom ... was sometimes a cabin boy on board the sloop *Sally Lloyd* (which Capt. Thomas Auld commanded), and when he came home from Baltimore he was always a sort of hero amongst us...."

Bolster's writing is intelligent and strong, as he stresses his central point that the life of a black sailor in the age of sail was essentially a dignified one. Life on the plantation involved endless menial labor, with few opportunities to develop meaningful skills of any kind, or to come to terms with responsibility and self-discipline. But life at sea involved substantial amounts of time working alone and without white supervision, and provided the black man with the ability to earn an income from labor and petty trading while roaming freely and observing the world. Bolster argues convincingly that for any ambitious African American trapped in the plantation world of the Americas, the life of a maritime sailor represented a huge leap forward in circumstances and possibilities.

By the early nineteenth century, the most influential "middle class" black families in the North habitually sent their children to sea. The maritime "finishing school" inculcated values of equality and worth into their children, for they were working side by side with white men on an equal footing. Paul Cuffe and James Forten, a Philadelphia sailmaker who patented a device for handling sails, were men whose families "shipped out." The principal danger was the immorality that was inevitably associated with life at sea, but the "best" Northern families were prepared to run this risk if it meant that future generations might secure for themselves an independent financial life.

No matter how successful a black mariner might be, however, his wealth and his status could be wiped out by legislation or prejudice or both. As attitudes hardened in the antebellum South, making it increasingly difficult for black sailors to step ashore without fear of being seized, the sea suddenly became a less attractive option. Physical abuse on board ships, and a dramatic fall in the wages being paid to both black and white sailors, led to the slow erosion of the advantages of black maritime life and the collapse of the status enjoyed by maritime families. Paul Cuffe's son spent his life at sea as little more than a common sailor, and by 1864 Cuffe's granddaughter Joanna was reduced to seeking public assistance in New Bedford.

"The contagion of liberty emanating from northern ships," as Bolster nicely describes it, received official legislative attention in the wake of Denmark Vesey's

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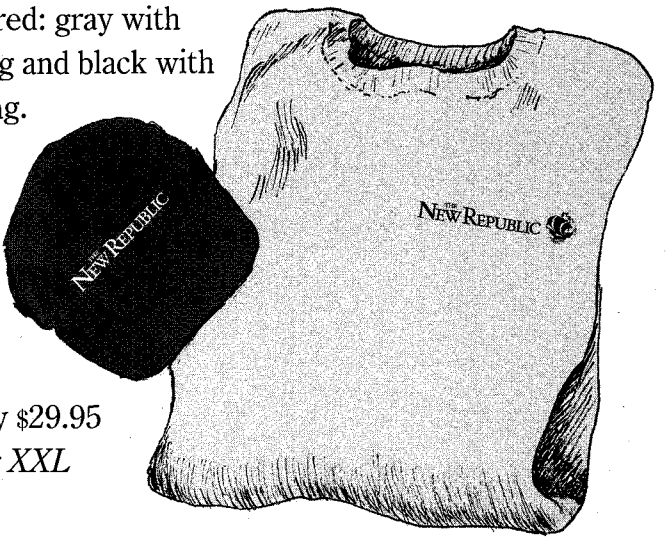

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attempted insurrection in Charleston in 1822. Vesey, a former mariner himself, used the "network" of black mariners to spread his "revolutionary" doctrine. An "Act for the better Regulation and Government of Free Negroes and Persons of Color" was passed in South Carolina in December 1822, and in three months in 1823 some 154 black seamen found themselves in prison. Their captains, or the shipowners, were required to pay their costs while the seamen languished in jail, and this naturally made white captains increasingly wary of taking on black crew.

In the years leading up to the Civil War, the period of relative plenty for black men on the sea came to an end. Changes in hiring practices, which now included the utilization of a middleman rather than the captain directly choosing his own crew, meant that the middleman (or the "crimp") tended to favor his own white mariners. On board ships blacks, now an ever-shrinking minority, found themselves marginalized as little more than cooks or stewards, and by the time of Abolition no truly ambitious African American would think of risking life and limb, to say nothing of dignity, on the sea.

That black sailors had been crucial mediators in the assertion of a dignified notion of black people is ably illustrated by Bolster's book. Yet he stubbornly insists that the achievement of African American sailors must be viewed in a broader context. He asserts that black seamen "clearly worked in an international world as members of the Atlantic community of color"—but it is highly debatable whether such a community ever existed. That there were black communities in the Caribbean and in England as in the United States is beyond any doubt. And that African American seamen travelled the waters between these communities is also beyond any doubt. But the idea of "the black Atlantic" world is a relatively new and insufficiently examined concept, as fostered by pioneering historians such as James Walvin, the late Paul Edwards (who edited Equiano's *Autobiography*), and more recent scholars such as Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy, whose book *The Black Atlantic* has become an influential text.

Of course, the notion of "the black Atlantic" is a useful one for contemporary scholars and for writers of fiction. Bolster's final sentence acknowledges this: "And for those concerned with the creation of America, the Black Jacks' story splices together African American and Atlantic maritime histories, fusing them in ways that storytellers worth their salt can no longer ignore." But "the black Atlantic" is a world that neither the individual seamen nor their respective communities would have recognized. It is only by looking back through the long telescope of history that we are able to impose order and coherence on a universe that would have appeared irreconcilably fractured to the black individuals who were trying to ride its powerful and adverse currents.

The real achievement of *Black Jacks* is to remind us that black seafaring in the age of sail was not limited to the middle passage, and that black sailors were the eyes, the ears, and the mouthpieces of the African American community at a time when America was attempting to stifle the community's collective cry of outrage. In the nineteenth century, the pulpit would eventually replace the forecastle as the wellspring of liberty. But Bolster shows us that for over a century, while seafaring remained a contemptible occupation for the white man, it was a noble occupation for the black man, and it played a central role in the creation of an African American identity.

CARYL PHILLIPS is the author, most recently, of *The Nature of Blood* (Knopf).

Divine Criticism

BY ANDREW DELBANCO

God and the American Writer by Alfred Kazin

(Knopf, 272 pp., $25)

"I am interested not in the artist's professions of belief," Alfred Kazin explains in his rich new book, "but in the imagination he brings to his tale of religion in human affairs." *God and the American Writer* is a loosely linked series of appreciative essays on writers ranging from Hawthorne to Faulkner, most of whom regarded institutional worship as a contradiction in terms. As early as 1838, Emerson was convinced that "no man can go with his thoughts about him into one of our churches, without feeling that what hold the public worship had on men is gone, or going." Yet the retrospective irony with which he wrote about the old religious forms was mixed with longing. Kazin catches this kind of ambivalence in Hawthorne's remark that "theological libraries [are] accumulations of, for the most part, stupendous impertinence," an inference that Hawthorne drew from a premise in which he still wanted to believe—that "an unfettered soul can attain to saving grace."

But if the old churches were "gone, or going," what could grace mean, and how would it come? For Emerson, the key was what Kazin calls "the transposition from God to man," the process by which every man discovers in himself "as commanding a force as Jesus." Whitman, ignited by Emerson (who, in turn, found *Leaves of Grass* "free and brave"), tried to find grace by turning the human body into an object of worship. "Liberated sex," as Kazin points out, "was ... a prelude to the comprehensive 'vision' he gained from sex"—a new kind of faith in which orgasm ("Is this then a touch? quivering me to a new identity,/Flames and ether making a rush for my veins") delivers something like spiritual transport.

But for other antebellum writers the body was hardly a conduit to God. Having heard that he was "disgraceful," Emily Dickinson never read Whitman. Harriet Beecher Stowe, to whom the old vocabulary of sin and redemption had been handed down pretty much unmodified by her evangelical father, believed that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was dictated by God as a means to awaken Americans to the sin of slavery. Still others, to use the phrase that Kazin applies to Lincoln, were "religiously tentative" figures to whom there clung "something of the Calvinism so natural to the hardships of the frontier."

One of Kazin's strongest chapters treats Melville as an "all-freezing nihilist behind the frantic seeker of the God he lost"—a portrait of a sapped man who, spent by the series of critically failed books into which he had poured his genius, journeyed at his father-in-law's expense to the Holy Land, where his family hoped he might somehow be restored to hope by contact with the sites of Christianity's birth. Kazin likens the extraordinary journal that Melville kept on that trip to "Leopold Bloom's journey into his innermost consciousness." Here is the visit to the Holy Sepulcher,

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which Melville rendered as a kind of carnival exhibit to which barkers lure credulous tourists while the locals shake their heads:

> [T]erraces of mouldy grottos, tomb, & shrines. Smells like a dead-house, dingy light.—At the entrance, in a sort of grotto in the wall a divan for Turkish policemen, where they sit crosslegged & smoking, scornfully observing the continuous troops of pilgrims entering & prostrating themselves before the anointing-stone of Christ, which veined with streaks of a mouldy red looks like a butcher's slab. Nearby is a blind stair of worn marble, ascending to the reputed Calvary where among other things the showman points you by the smoky light of old pawnbrokers lamps of dirty gold, the hole in which the cross was fixed and through a narrow grating as over a cole-cellar, point out the rent in the rock!

Of the long narrative poem, *Clarel*, that Melville built out of these materials, Kazin shrewdly remarks that "the past holiness of the land does nothing for those who bring nothing but their uncertainty. There is no magic in relics. Melville by the end affirms nothing but the Cross as the pain we must carry." Melville goes home unconsoled; but out of his failed quest he built an enduring poem that confirms that the death of God is a boon to the imagination. "No orthodoxy, ever," as Kazin puts it, "permits the irony, skepticism, personal despair—above all the sense of contradiction and unreality in human affairs that makes up the true storyteller."

The story that most exercises Kazin's attention is how these post-theistic writers cope with death. Their subject remains the fate of the soul, as he shows in his discussion of Dickinson's famous poem "Because I could not stop for Death—":

> The question the faithful asked of death was once comfortably answered: There is no death. It is only a passing from one "room" to another. But for Dickinson the artist the denial or affirmation of another life was all hypothesis by contrast with the drama of consciousness lingering and dying. "Because I could not stop for Death" triumphs over death—the death of time in us—by prolonging the last day into the "surmise" that there will be no other. Until *that* shudder of recognition everything has been politesse.

Punctuating his remarks about Dickinson with personal asides, Kazin reflects that "the very light of winter afternoons in the Connecticut Valley, as I have reason to remember, can strike dread." We get no elaboration—no interpolated bit of memoir—yet the passing phrase ("as I have reason to remember") gives a glimpse of this quintessential New York intellectual out of the city, geographically but also spiritually, stricken by the fading light far from the city where winter sunsets make themselves felt only if one happens to be walking on a lateral West Side block in late afternoon.

More than fifty years ago, the 26-year-old prodigy discovered his country's literature in the reading room of the New York Public Library and wrote a genuinely dazzling book. Ever since *On Native Grounds*, Kazin's writing has been fearless in its judgments, sometimes verging on the oracular. On Hawthorne: "Of all the American masters in this period, [he] was the only one capable of acknowledging full heterosexual love in his work." On Robert Frost: "Frost was *the* poet of marriage." But at his best, Kazin has the zeal of an artist possessed, rather than the caution of a strenuous critic. "Farce," he writes, "is catastrophe without a context and without a solution." This is the kind of sentence that few critics dare write today—a sentence that moves outward from literature to life, propelled by the belief that old books can be aids to reflection on new circumstances. His books lead openly double lives as accounts of particular literary performances (the remark about farce introduces a discussion of how *Moby-Dick* "trembles on the verge of farce") and as unashamedly universal descriptions of human experience. "Faith," he writes, in a sentence that comes of a long life spanning most of our merciless century,"...is what remains within the anguish of seeing so many things destroyed...."

In the end, *God and the American Writer* reveals a relation to religion much like that of the writers whom it celebrates. About God, Kazin is simultaneously wary and intimate. Undiminished in his eighties, he stands alongside his friend and kindred spirit Edmund Wilson, who used to tell him during summers on Cape Cod that "we must simply live without religion"—even as Wilson proudly acknowledged his descent from the New England Mathers and taught himself Hebrew so that he could read the Old Testament in the original. Kazin, too, comes at literature with something like awe for what might be called its sacramental power. All his books are deeply felt elaborations of how Whitman's prophecy—"the priest departs, the divine literatus comes"—has been fulfilled.

ANDREW DELBANCO's new book, *Required Reading: Why Our American Classics Matter Now*, has just been published by Farrar, Straus & Giroux.

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NEW YORK DIARIST

Benched

MY MOTHER WANTED A BENCH when she died, not a gravestone. Though she had read Emerson, I think her request had less to do with transcendentalism than with pragmatism. My mother was a psychotherapist. She liked furniture that reclined, for her own comfort as well as for that of her patients. Her office in our New York apartment looked like a bookish opium den. When I was little, I'd squint through the keyhole and see Mom and some weeping client, both splayed on sofas and divans, their feet suspended in the air. I suspect she thought that her bench, an ordinary person's cenotaph, would welcome the weary, including her family and friends. There was some precedent for this: a memorial bench for my grandmother sits under a eucalyptus in Golden Gate Park's Strybing Arboretum, in San Francisco. My mother occasionally sat there on foggy afternoons and ate lunch.

THOUGH I NEVER FULLY UNDERstood my mother's preoccupation with public spaces—with a cemetery that invites living strangers, not just dead ones—I wanted to respect it. And so last spring, on a breezy day, I set out in New York City to find Andrea Hill of the Central Park Conservancy. She helps with the group's bench adoption program in Central Park, not far from where my mother had lived most of her life. I instantly knew which of the women sitting on the benches at the West 81st Street entrance was Ms. Hill, because she was the only one not reading a paper or gripping a leash. "I'm sorry to hear about your mother's death," she said, her forehead bunched in concern. I thanked her and told her how fond my mother was of Central Park, and, for that matter, of benches. I envisioned Betsy's Bench among the ballplayers and sunbathers, where we used to ride bicycles around the Great Lawn, just north of Belvedere Castle. "Perhaps we should look there?" I asked. "Ah," said Ms. Hill, adjusting her light overcoat, "that part of the park is closed for construction. But there are many other lovely spots."

MS. HILL TOLD ME THAT MOST OF the adopted benches—they prefer to call them "adopted" rather than "bought"—are on the East Side. That is the part of the park first renovated by the nonprofit Conservancy, and it is where most of the people live who wish to dedicate benches. Of course, there are exceptions; one woman dedicated a bench near West 79th Street to both her dog, Dinkle, and her rabbit, Stuella. The East Side has its eccentrics, too. There's the romantic story about the man who adopted a bench reading, "Marry Me?" and then sat there with his girlfriend until she accepted. The bench program, said Ms. Hill, is mostly word-of-mouth. It costs $5,000 to adopt a bench, and that is only four feet of bench. For that price, the Conservancy screws on a small plaque and pledges to remove graffiti within 36 hours. When a truck accidentally ran over some benches near the Grand Army Plaza at 60th Street, the Conservancy promptly replaced them.

EVEN THOUGH MUCH of the Upper West Side was still under construction, it was where I wanted the bench. Ms. Hill took me to the Shakespeare Garden just west of the Delacorte Theatre. But the small lawns there, it seems, are fenced off every winter for reseeding, which would keep Mom's loyal progeny from the bench eight months a year. The cul-de-sac part of the garden was attractive but I found it vaguely pretentious. Obscure quotes pasted to rocks sprouted like bulbs all along the walk: "Where the bee sucks, there suck I." It was also touristy. Fifteen million people visit the park annually, and I'm not sure I want all of them sitting on mother's bench.

MS. HILL THEN SUGGESTED STRAWberry Fields, where the benches are in the "world's fair" style, featuring ornate ironwork and large circular armrests. But most of them overlook the big "Imagine" mosaic, and my mother, if she knew, would roll her eyes and say, "Spare me." I liked a more secluded spot in the North Ramble, down in the Seventies, but Ms. Hill appeared apprehensive. "You know," she said, "the Ramble can be unsavory." She then showed me a bench near 81st Street that a woman had recently picked out for her late husband. The woman lives in the Beresford, and she can sit on the bench and look up at her building. The bench was okay, but it was next to an overflowing trash can. Large-animal excrement lay smooshed directly where one's feet would rest. I hoped it was deposited by a dog. The bench also had the words "Nena y Macho" scratched onto it like a petroglyph. "We'll repaint it," assured Ms. Hill.

TIRED, I THOUGHT OF THE PARK'S 5,812 benches we had yet to even see. I wondered if I should adopt a tree instead, which costs only $1,000 (though you don't get a plaque). At last I spotted a string of benches in a newly landscaped area called Naturalist's Walk. Nearby, a bridge crossed a creek and I heard birds. Emerson would be pleased. Sitting on a bench (the "settee" style, simple wood and iron, no armrests), I saw the tops of the Museum of Natural History and the New York Historical Society, as well as many ginkgo and cherry trees. The bench was both restful and democratic, as my mother would have wanted. I smiled. Ms. Hill appeared relieved. "I'm late for an appointment," she said, promising to send the paperwork.

SO I HAD A BENCH INstead of a tombstone, but I still had to decide what to do with the ashes. A few days later I returned alone, carrying a handful of ashes and a small garden trowel in the wide, front pocket of my anorak. When I got to the park, it was suitably deserted. I pulled the trowel out of my pocket and set to work under the tree. When I was midpour, I heard an engine. It was one of those little green golf carts zipping down the path with two green-clad men in it. I pretended to be studying the tree's bark, as if I were as nutty as the man talking to the downy woodpecker a few yards away. The cart didn't even slow down. I took a deep breath, and finished patting down the mulch. I looked at the empty bench. There was only one final problem: I couldn't bring myself to sit down.

WHEN I RETURNED AFTER SOME weeks, I was afraid I wouldn't be able to recognize the bench. The park was busier than I'd seen it. Rollerbladers and families gave the Naturalist's Walk a fresh chaos. Then I saw the small, elegant plaque: "Betsy's Bench." Next to the bench a trash can bulged with hot dog wrappers and juice bottles. I shoved it a few feet away with my foot. I sat down and took out my lunch. I was halfway through a bagel when an unsteady, ill-dressed man holding a rusty camera sat down beside me. His left hand, mottled and callused, rubbed against the back of the bench. I froze, unsure what to do. "Excuse me," I whispered, but he didn't move. I stood up, and glared at him. But he simply looked at me, as if I were crazy, and reclined further, his arms shielding the shiny plaque. And I knew, in that strange instant, I had fulfilled my mother's request.

FLORENCE WILLIAMS

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